Opinion Elon Musk's Twitter is fast proving that free speech at all costs is a dangerous fantasy
Nesrine Malik
page 15

Environment Here are some crucial issues we're covering in 2023 – with your help
page 34

Tuesday 29 November 2022
theguardian.com/us
Published in New York, United States

The Guardian
US edition

Barriers have been set up along a road in Shanghai where protests took place on Saturday and Sunday. Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

Chinese police out in force in attempt to deter Covid lockdown protests

Helen Davidson in Taipei and Verna Yu

Chinese police have launched a show of force across the country in an effort to head off further protests against the government's rigid zero-Covid policies and tackle what have become the most extraordinary acts of civil disobedience in the country for decades.

Dozens of police cars lined the streets around a central Beijing subway station and patrolled surrounding blocks on Monday evening, while uniformed and plain-clothed officers stood guard at station exits and stopped passersby for questioning. Hours after the scheduled start of a protest organised via encrypted messaging apps there were few apparent participants.

In Shanghai, authorities barricaded a street where protesters had gathered for the past two nights. A heavy police presence lined the city's Middle Urumqi Road according to people nearby and footage shared online. Edward Lawrence, a BBC journalist who was allegedly detained and beaten by police on Sunday before being freed, filmed bystanders having their photos forcibly deleted by police.

Some small actions were held, according to observers sharing videos and photos online. According to a Twitter account that has been sharing protest material in recent days, a small group of people holding up blank sheets of paper in Kunming were later taken away by police.

At Beijing's elite Tsinghua University, where large protests were held on Sunday, school authorities on Monday announced a student symposium on the pandemic, and a free bus to help students get home early for the holidays. The announcement was greeted with some scepticism, given the term is not over yet.

"The school is afraid that passionate youths will make trouble, so the students are given an early holiday," said one Weibo online commenter. "They are afraid of the student movement," said another.

Since Friday, a wave of protests has spread across multiple cities, prompted by the death of 10 people in a building fire in Urumqi in Xinjiang. Much of the region had been under lockdown for more than three months, and people blamed the lockdown for the deaths.

Gatherings held to protest or to mourn the victims were held in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and other major Chinese cities on Saturday and Sunday, as well as dozens of university campuses, with some police clashes and detentions in Shanghai.

Protesters demanded an end to lockdowns, while some groups decried censorship and called for democracy and an end to the rule of Xi Jinping. Most protests were peaceful. There were some clashes with police in Shanghai, and protesters in Wuhan pushed over pandemic barriers.

The growing protests have demonstrated a growing frustration and scepticism with the ruling Communist party's commitment to zero-Covid.

A series of incidents related to the enforcement of the policy, including a bus crash that killed 27 people being taken to quarantine, and numerous suicides and other deaths linked to lockdowns and restrictions, have tested people's tolerance. Last Thursday's fire appears to have been a final straw for many.

The widespread protests included prolific use of blank sheets of paper to represent the dissent Chinese people are largely unable to safely express. In one shared video apparently showing a crowd at Beijing's Liangma bridge, a man clad in white says "we'll always support the Communist party, but we want democracy and freedom!" as he holds up a blank piece of paper.

Many protests have heard demands for democracy and rule of law, as well as press freedom and an end to online censorship. There have also been chants echoing the slogans displayed by the Beijing Sitong bridge protester on the eve of last month's Communist party congress political meeting.

In video showing a crowd that had gathered on Wuyuan Road in Shanghai's Xuhui district, people cheer and clap as a woman's voice shouts out: "We want respect, not lies. We want reform, not a cultural revolution. We want a vote, not a leader. We want to be citizens, not slaves."

Asked about the Urumqi fire at a regular press conference on Monday, a spokesperson for the ministry of foreign affairs said "forces with ulterior motives" were linking the fire with zero-Covid measures.

Blaming foreign influence for local dissent is common from the Beijing authorities. At one protest on Sunday, protesters appeared to make reference

Continued *on page 2*

VISIT…

LANZAROTE Caliente.COM

Continued from page 1

to it.

"The foreign force you talked about – are they Marx and Engels?" shouted one. "Was it foreign force that set the fire in Xinjiang? Was it foreign force that toppled over the bus in Guizhou?" said another.

One man drew laughs when he noted the extraordinary restrictions already in place on residents. "Can't go abroad, can't go on overseas [news] networks, how do we communicate with foreign forces!"

Chen Daoyin, a political scientist formerly at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, said since the protests were unorganised, uncoordinated and lacked a unified voice, they posed no serious threat to the authorities and, within the party, may even serve to justify Xi's hardline approach.

"It might even bolster Xi's authority in the party," Chen said. Since protesters have used the 11 November announcement of a partial easing of Covid measures as a justification for their calls for a relaxation and even bolder calls for freedom and the removal of Xi and the Communist party, this could allow Xi to prove to his opponents that he was right to insist on an iron-fisted "zero-Covid" approach, he said.

Xi, known for his insistence on zero-Covid and a "war" against the pandemic, has repeatedly stressed the importance of "political security" and the need of "struggles" against challenges and instability.

"Don't underestimate the Communist party's and especially Xi's determination to guard against 'colour revolution'," Chen said.

Online discussion of the protests has been strictly censored, particularly on social media platforms such as Weibo, but information and evidence of the protests are still being shared on more private channels such as WeChat, also monitored by the state.

On Twitter, which is banned in China but has been a key site of reposted protest material, Chinese-language hashtags are being flooded by suspected state actors with pornographic and escort service posts.

Chinese state media has not mentioned the protests.

Additional research by Chi Hui Lin

US judge orders Amazon to 'cease and desist' anti-union retaliation

Michael Sainato

Amazon will be forced to read out a public notice this week to all employees at a warehouse in Staten Island, New York, where workers won the first Amazon union election, stating it will "cease and desist" from retaliating against people involved in union organizing.

US district judge Diane Gujarati ruled on 18 November that Amazon cease and desist from retaliating against workers for organizing in the workplace, in response to Amazon employee Gerald Bryson's termination in April 2020. She included in her ruling that Amazon read out publicly her 30-page decision to employees, which is set to be conducted on Thursday 1 December.

While the order does not reinstate Bryson, Amazon could be held in contempt of court if found to be violating the order.

▲ *Workers at the Staten Island warehouse in New York. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters*

"The judge's order in this case recognizes Amazon's unlawful conduct and provides the full force of a federal court injunction to prohibit Amazon from further discharging employees for engaging in protected concerted activity," Teresa Poor, the regional director of the Brooklyn office of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), said in a statement.

"This relief is critical to ensure that Amazon employees everywhere can fully and freely exercise their rights to join together and improve their working conditions, including by forming, assisting, or joining a union."

Amazon's Staten Island warehouse, known as JFK8, became the first to pass a union vote in April. The company has since defeated attempts to unionize other warehouses.

The public reading to workers of the court order comes as Amazon Labor Union is organizing a public protest on Wednesday, outside of a public appearance by the Amazon chief executive, Andy Jassy, at the New York Times' Dealbook Summit event in Manhattan.

"If Jassy comes to New York he should come to bargain a contract with Amazon workers, not bluster or practice union-busting," the Amazon Labor Union president, Chris Smalls, said in a statement. "It's time that Amazon and the company's CEO respect the rights of workers and join ALU in improving working conditions, rather than acting as an uncaring, BS-spouting, corporate law-breaker."

Amazon has aggressively opposed unionization efforts within its warehouses, fending off union elections in Bessemer, Alabama, a second warehouse in Staten Island, and another outside Albany, the New York state capital. Numerous unfair labor practice charges against Amazon related to those campaigns are still under review at the NLRB.

Amazon attempted to challenge the union election at JFK8 after the victory of the independent Amazon Labor Union, but lost that challenge, and the NLRB has recommended the union be certified.

Bruno Fernandes double sinks Uruguay and sends Portugal into last 16

Andy Hunter at Lusail Stadium

Cristiano Ronaldo was claiming the goal long after the final whistle and despite all available evidence to the contrary. The superstar without a club was denied, and denied another slice of Portuguese football history too, and may eventually have to accept his country's serene progress into the last 16 of the World Cup was somewhat more important. Bruno Fernandes scored twice – despite Ronaldo's protestations that he converted the first goal against Uruguay – to ensure Portugal joined Brazil and France as the only teams with a 100% start in the competition.

An eagerly-awaited clash of two talented and tempestuous heavyweights did not meet expectations but the repercussions could prove monumental for Uruguay. The South Americans must beat Ghana on Friday and hope Portugal do them a favour against South Korea to avoid an ignominious early exit. Ghana have waited 12 years for a chance to avenge their infamous defeat by the hand of Luis Suárez at the 2010 World Cup. How they would love to torment a Uruguay team that is yet to become the sum of its big name parts in Qatar.

▲ *Bruno Fernandes (centre) celebrates his opening goal for Portugal with Cristiano Ronaldo and Bernardo Silva. Photograph: Javier García/Shutterstock*

"It is a crucial game but it has nothing to do with what happened 12 years ago," insisted the Uruguay head coach Diego Alonso. "This is a different situation. We will bring all the weapons we have." Alonso started with Federico Valverde, Rodrigo Bentancur, Darwin Núñez and Edinson Cavani. He introduced Suárez and Maxi Gómez, who both went close to equalising before Portugal were awarded a ridiculously harsh penalty in stoppage time.

But they were second best throughout to a Portugal team that needed to be patient before finding holes in a resilient Uruguay defence in the second half. Uruguay committed the first foul inside 25 seconds and collected the first booking after six minutes, when Bentancur foolishly fouled Rúben Dias. But it did not develop into a simmering game of needle and gamesmanship, despite the presence of Pepe, Suárez and others. There was little sign of urgency from Uruguay either in the opening half an hour as they allowed Portugal to dominate possession without seriously troubling the goalkeeper Sergio Rochet. Cavani and Núñez were isolated until Bentancur brought belated positivity to Uruguay's performance.

The Tottenham midfielder should have opened the scoring following a fine run from inside his own half that took him past William Carvalho and Dias. There was one job left to do but, as Diogo Costa advanced, he shot straight at the Portugal goalkeeper who saved with his thigh before gathering at the second attempt. The faces said everything. Bentancur looked to the sky and cursed his finish. Dias and Carvalho glared at each other over their lack of protection.

▲ *A protester is chased by security while holding a rainbow flag and with a shirt saying 'Respect For Iranian Women' on his back. Photograph: Marc Atkins/Getty*

A lone and brave pitch invader ran onto the pitch early in the second half

Continued on page 3

Continued *from page 2*

carrying a rainbow flag in protest at Qatar's discriminatory laws. The protestor sported a Superman t-shirt that also had 'Save Ukraine' printed on the front and 'Respect for Iranian Women' on the back. He was wrestled to the ground by two security guards before others helped escort him away.

When the game restarted, Portugal seized control thanks to Fernandes' beautiful cross from the left. Ronaldo read the Manchester United midfielder's intention perfectly and, played onside by the right wing-back Guillermo Varela, soared to send a glancing header into the far corner. Or so everyone would have thought from Ronaldo's celebrations. Replays showed he never made contact and Fernandes was rightly awarded the goal.

Ronaldo stared at a giant screen with a look of amusement and amazement as his ninth World Cup goal was chalked off. It would have taken him level with Eusébio's World Cup goalscoring record for Portugal. His nine all came at the 1966 edition. "The most important thing is that we achieved our aim which is to be in the next round," said Fernandes. "I celebrated as if it had been Cristiano's goal. It seemed to me that he had touched the ball. My aim was to cross the ball for him."

Uruguay responded well and were desperately unfortunate not to level when Gómez struck a post following a neat exchange on the edge of the Portugal penalty area. Costa was well beaten but saved by his left hand post. Suárez, who was arguing with the fourth official before setting foot on the pitch, was inches away from converting Giorgian de Arrascaeta's free-kick at the near post. Their misfortune carried into stoppage time when Portugal were awarded a penalty after Fernandes had nut-megged José María Giménez on the edge of the area. The ball struck the defender's trailing hand as he fell into the challenge and used his arm to support himself yet the Iranian referee was advised to check the pitch-side monitor.

He gave a most draconian penalty, sparking understandable fury among Uruguay's players. Fernandes kept his cool and with a hop, skip and a jump, sent Rochet the wrong way from the spot. The United midfielder was denied a hat-trick by the legs of the Uruguay keeper and a post in the closing seconds. He then had to listen to Ronaldo, who would have taken the penalty had he not been substituted, harp on about the first goal glancing his hair. Ah well, onwards and upwards.

Hawaii's Mauna Loa volcano erupts as officials warn people to prepare to evacuate

Associated Press in Honolulu

Waves of orange, glowing lava and smoky ash belched and sputtered Monday from the world's largest active volcano in its first eruption in 38 years, and officials told people living on Hawaii's Big Island to be ready in the event of a worst-case scenario.

The eruption of Mauna Loa wasn't immediately endangering towns, but the US Geological Survey warned the roughly 200,000 people on the Big Island that an eruption "can be very dynamic, and the location and advance of lava flows can change rapidly".

Officials told residents to be prepared to evacuate if lava flows started heading toward populated areas.

The eruption began late Sunday night in the summit caldera of the volcano on the Big Island, the US Geological Survey said. Early on Monday, it said lava flows were not threatening nearby communities.

Ken Hon, scientist-in-charge at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, said air quality could deteriorate while the eruption lasted, which scientists expect will be about one or two weeks if the volcano follows historical patterns.

▲ *Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, began erupting on Sunday for the first time since 1984. Photograph: USGS/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock*

Bobby Camara, a lifelong Big Island resident who lives in Volcano Village, said everyone across the island should keep track of the eruption. He said he had seen three Mauna Loa eruptions in his lifetime and stressed the need for vigilance.

"I think everybody should be a little bit concerned," he said. "We don't know where the flow is going, we don't know how long it's going to last."

Officials urged the public to stay away, given the dangers posed by lava, which is shooting 100 to 200ft (30 to 60 meters) into the air out of three separate fissures estimated to be 1 to 2 miles (1.6 to 3.2 km) long.

Volcanic gases wafting out of the vents, primarily sulfur dioxide, are also harmful.

The USGS said it had opened shelters in Kailua-Kona and Pahala because it had reports of people self-evacuating along the South Kona coast.

The USGS said the eruption had migrated to a rift zone on the volcano's north-east flank. Rift zones are where the mountain rock is cracked and relatively weak, making it easier for magma to emerge.

Gunner Mench, who owns an art gallery in Kamuela, said he had awoken shortly after midnight and seen an alert on his phone about the eruption.

Mench and his wife, Ellie, ventured out to film the eerie red glow cast over the island, watching as lava spilled down the volcano's side.

"You could see it spurting up into the air, over the edge of this depression," Mench said. "Right now it's just entertainment, but the concern is" it could reach populated areas, he said.

The USGS warned residents at risk from Mauna Loa lava flows should review their eruption preparations. Scientists had been on alert because of a recent spike in earthquakes at the summit of the volcano, which last erupted in 1984.

Portions of the Big Island were under an ashfall advisory issued by the National Weather Service in Honolulu, which said up to a quarter-inch (0.6cm) of ash could accumulate in some areas.

"Volcanic gas and possibly fine ash and Pele's hair may be carried downwind," Governor David Ige said, referring to glass fibers that form when hot lava erupts from a fissure and rapidly cools in the air. The wind stretches the fibers into long strands that look like hair. "So certainly we would ask those with respiratory sensitivities to take precautions to minimize exposure."

▲ *Lava in the summit caldera of Mauna Loa. Photograph: US Geological Survey/AFP/Getty Images*

Mauna Loa is one of five volcanoes that together make up the Big Island of Hawaii, which is the southernmost island in the Hawaiian archipelago.

Mauna Loa, rising 13,679ft (4,169m) above sea level, is the much larger neighbor to Kilauea volcano, which erupted in a residential neighborhood and destroyed 700 homes in 2018. Some of its slopes are much steeper than Kilauea's so when it erupts, its lava can flow much faster.

During a 1950 eruption, the mountain's lava traveled 15 miles (24km) to the ocean in less than three hours.

New York man pleads guilty to Buffalo supermarket killing spree

Associated Press

The white gunman who fatally shot 10 Black shoppers and workers at a Buffalo supermarket earlier this year pleaded guilty on Monday to murder and hate-motivated terrorism charges, guaranteeing he will spend the rest of his life in prison.

Payton Gendron, 19, entered the plea on Monday in a courthouse roughly two miles from the grocery store where he used a semiautomatic rifle and body armor to carry out a racist assault he hoped would help preserve white power in the US.

Gendron, who was handcuffed and wore an orange jumpsuit, occasionally licked and clenched his lips as he pleaded guilty to all of the most serious charges against him, including murder, murder as a hate crime and hate-motivated domestic terrorism, which carries an automatic sentence of life without parole.

▲ *A memorial at the Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, New York, where a white supremacist killed 10 Black people on 14 May. Photograph: Reuters*

He answered "yes" and "guilty" as the judge in his case, Susan Eagan, referred to each victim by name and asked whether he killed them because of their race. Gendron also pleaded guilty to wounding three people who survived the May attack.

Many of the relatives of those victims sat and watched, some dabbing their eyes and sniffling. Speaking to reporters later, several said the plea left them cold. It didn't address the bigger problem, which they said is racism in the US.

"His voice made me feel sick, but it showed me I was right," said Zeneta Everhart, whose 20-year-old son was shot in the neck but survived. "This country has a problem. This country is inherently violent. It is racist. And his voice showed that to me."

After the roughly 45-minute proceeding ended, Gendron's lawyers suggested that he now regrets his crimes, but they didn't elaborate or take questions.

One of the lawyers, Brian Parker, said he hoped the conclusion of the case against Gendron – who is also facing state charges – would "help in some small way to keep the focus on the needs of the victims and the community".

▲ *Families of the Tops Friendly Market victims were escorted into court before the accused killer pleaded guilty to charges in Buffalo, New York, on 28 November 2022. Photograph: Lindsay Dedario/Reuters*

Gendron has pleaded not guilty to separate federal hate crime charges that could result in a death sentence if he is convicted of them. The US justice department has not said if it will

Continued *on page 4*

Continued from page 3

seek capital punishment.

Acknowledgment of guilt and a claim of repentance could help Gendron in a penalty phase of a death penalty trial.

The plea comes at a time when many Americans have become nearly desensitized to mass shootings. In recent weeks, there have been deadly attacks at a Walmart in Virginia, at a gay club in Colorado and at the University of Virginia.

Just days after Gendron's rampage in Buffalo, a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers at a school in Uvalde, Texas.

Gendron wore body armor and used a legally bought AR-15-style rifle in his attack on the Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo. Those killed ranged in age from 32 to 86 and included an armed security guard who died trying to protect customers, a church deacon and the mother of a former Buffalo fire commissioner. Gendron surrendered when police confronted him as he emerged from the store.

Buffalo's Democratic mayor, Byron Brown, who was in the courtroom for Gendron's guilty plea, called for a ban on assault weapons, as did the city's police commissioner, Joseph Gramaglia.

Relatives of the victims reiterated their calls for Congress and the FBI to address white supremacy and gun violence.

"We are literally begging for those in power to do something about it," said Garnell Whitfield, whose 86-year-old mother, Ruth Whitfield, was killed.

White supremacy was Gendron's motive. He said in documents posted online just before the attack that he'd picked the store, about a three-hour drive from his home in Conklin, New York, because it was in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

He said he was motivated by a belief in a massive conspiracy to dilute the power of white people by "replacing" them in the US with people of color.

Elon Musk accuses Apple of threatening to remove Twitter from App Store

Dan Milmo Global technology editor

Elon Musk has accused Apple of threatening to remove Twitter from its App Store without giving a reason to the social media platform.

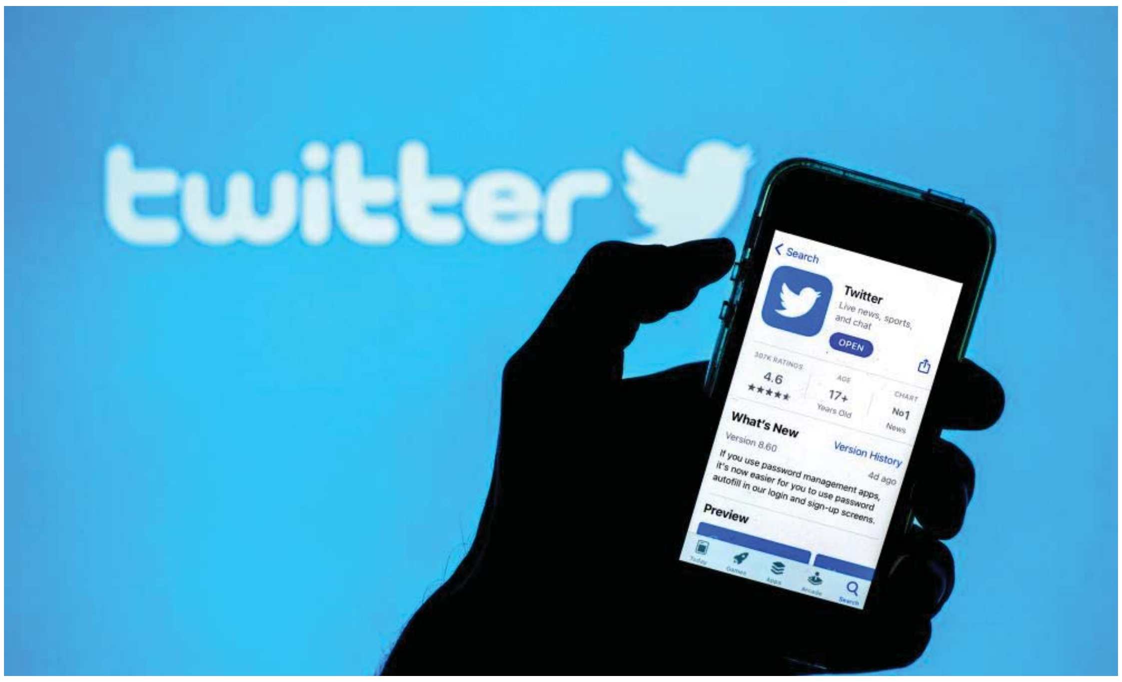
Twitter's new owner also said the iPhone maker had stopped advertising on Twitter, prompting him to ask if the tech group hated free speech.

Musk revealed the potential App Store ban in a series of tweets on Monday. He tweeted: "Apple has also threatened to withhold Twitter from its App Store, but won't tell us why."

Musk appeared to confirm that Twitter content moderation was an issue for Apple. Asked by a journalist user if Apple was "threatening Twitter's presence in the App Store or otherwise making moderation demands", Musk replied "yes".

Apple has been contacted for comment.

Earlier this month Twitter's former head of trust and safety, who resigned in the wake of Musk's $44bn (£36.8bn) takeover, warned of a "catastrophic" expulsion from the Apple and Google app stores. Yoel Roth wrote in the New York Times that any ejection from those app stores would make it "difficult for billions of potential users to get Twitter's services". Apple's app guidelines state the company will reject apps "for any content or behavior that we believe is over the line".



▲ Musks comments appear to be a confirmation that Twitter content moderation is a problem for Apple. Photograph: Thiago Prudencio/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Earlier this month Phil Schiller, who leads Apple's App Store, deleted his Twitter account in a move that immediately gave rise to speculation that Musk's business relationship with a key Twitter app distributor was becoming strained.

Parler, the rightwing social network being acquired by US rapper Ye, was restored by Apple in 2021 after the app updated its content and moderation practices, the companies said at the time.

One hour before disclosing the App Store threat, Musk also claimed that Apple had mostly stopped advertising on Twitter. He tweeted: "Apple has mostly stopped advertising on Twitter. Do they hate free speech in America?" He then tagged Apple's CEO, Tim Cook, asking "what's going on here".

Apple spent an estimated $131,600 on Twitter ads between 10 November and 16 November, down from $220,800 between 16 October and 22 October, the week before Musk closed the Twitter deal, according to ad measurement firm Pathmatics.

Musk also tweeted a jibe on Thursday at the up to 30% fee Apple charges software developers for in-app purchases, with Musk posting a meme suggesting he was willing to "go to war" with Apple rather than pay the commission.

Musk, a self-described "free speech absolutist", has alarmed advertisers who are concerned that he will allow a proliferation of hate speech on Twitter. Many big corporate names, including General Motors and Chipotle, have paused spending on Twitter. Their stance has been reinforced by a botched overhaul of Twitter's verification service, which resulted in a spate of impersonator accounts being launched on the platform.

Last week Musk announced a "general amnesty" for permanently suspended Twitter accounts in a move that paved the way for the return of figures such as Steve Bannon, the former Donald Trump adviser, and Katie Hopkins, the rightwing UK commentator. Musk has already reinstated Trump's account although the ex-US president has yet to use it since being allowed back on Twitter.

Mexico requests extradition of American charged in tourist death

Adam Gabbatt and agencies

The US is weighing an extradition request from Mexico after authorities in the country charged an American woman with murdering another US woman shown being beaten while they vacationed in a viral video.

Prosecutors in the Mexican state of Baja California Sur have not named the suspect in the death of North Carolina's Shanquella Robinson, who reportedly died of a severe spinal cord or neck injury while on holiday in Mexico on 29 October.

Robinson's death sparked mass intrigue on social media after a viral video showed her being beaten, apparently by an American woman. Robinson had traveled to San Jose del Cabo with friends, who told Robinson's family she died from alcohol poisoning.

But a copy of Robinson's death certificate, obtained by Charlotte news channel WBTV, said the cause of her death was "severe spinal cord injury and atlas luxation".

▲ A beach in Los Cabos, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Photograph: Carlos Sanchez Pereyra/Alamy

State prosecutors said evidence showed the death resulted from "a direct attack, not an accident", and involved a female friend of the victim, CNN reported. They said they have approached Mexican federal prosecutors and diplomats to try to get an unnamed female suspect extradited to face charges in Mexico.

Robinson's death shocked people in both Mexico and the US.

The 25-year-old had arrived in San Jose del Cabo on 28 October and was staying at a vacation rental home with college friends, her father told CNN.

Robinson's mother, Salamondra Robinson, told CBS News that her daughter's friends initially said she had become sick with alcohol poisoning.

However, when a video showing Robinson being beaten went viral, in mid-November, it raised suspicions that Robinson may have died at the hands of people with whom she traveled.

The video shows Robinson being thrown to the ground and struck on the head. In the footage a man with an American accent can be heard saying: "Can you at least fight back?" The man did not appear to intervene in the beating.

Salamondra Robinson confirmed to CBS News that it was her daughter in the video, adding that a man on the trip "supposedly was her best friend".

"And he had went on family trips with us, you know?" Salamondra Robinson added. "And he had been to the family house."

The group Robinson was traveling with left Mexico after she was found dead.

Local prosecutor Antonio López Rodríguez said the case was being treated as a potential homicide and an arrest warrant had been issued for the suspect, the Associated Press reported.

The attorney general for Baja California Sur, Daniel de la Rosa Anaya, said the death did not result from a "quarrel" but from "a direct aggression that this person made", according to CNN. De la Rosa Anaya confirmed that the suspect was an American but did not identify her.

Texas woman found by family 51 years after being kidnapped as baby

Ramon Antonio Vargas

More than 50 years after her babysitter kidnapped her as a baby in Texas, a US woman has reunited with her family, who tracked their missing loved one down with a DNA test and without help from law enforcement or other outside involvement.

The incredible saga centering on the disappearance of Melissa Highsmith concluded in South Carolina on Saturday, according to a report from the Charleston television news station WCIV as well as a news release from her family.

Highsmith was a year old in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1971 when her mother, Alta Apantenco, published a newspaper advertisement asking for a babysitter. Raising Melissa on her own and needing someone to care for her daughter while she worked her job, Apatenco hired a woman who expressed interest in the job without ever meeting her in person.

Apatenco's roommate handed Melissa over to the babysitter, who allegedly abducted her and never returned her.

Loved ones of Highsmith reported her missing to police and never forgot her in the more than half-century since,

▲ *Melissa Highsmith, middle, is flanked by her mother Alta Atapenco and father Jeffrie Highsmith. Photograph: Courtesy of Highsmith family*

even throwing birthday parties for her every November. More recently, they also organized a Facebook page named "Finding Melissa Highsmith" and solicited help in finding their missing relative.

Then, in September, loved ones of Highsmith received an anonymous tip that she was around Charleston, which is more than 1,100 miles from Fort Worth, WCIV reported. The family used the results of a 23andMe DNA test, a birthmark on Melissa and her birthday to confirm that she indeed was the girl who had been taken from them 51 years ago.

On Saturday, during a celebration at the family's church in Fort Worth, Melissa reunited with her mother, her father and two of her four siblings, the group said in a statement obtained by the Guardian on Monday.

"I couldn't stop crying," sister Victoria Garner said in the statement. "I was overjoyed, and I'm still walking around in a fog trying to comprehend that my sister [was] right in front of me and that we found her."

In the family's statement, another sister – Sharon Highsmith, who lives in Spain and plans to meet Melissa this Christmas – described how her relatives had turned to law enforcement officials for assistance. But it was their own private search for Melissa, which included the 23andMe test, that paid off.

Sharon Highsmith said her family connected with a clinical laboratory scientist and amateur genealogist named Lisa Jo Schiele to help them with interpreting the key DNA results and mining publicly available records to locate Melissa.

"Our family has suffered at the hands of agencies who have mismanaged this case," Sharon Highsmith said. "Right now, we just want to get to know Melissa, welcome her to the family and make up for 50 years of lost time."

It wasn't immediately clear Monday what became of the babysitter.

Sharon Highsmith said she was particularly thankful for her mother, who – in addition to being racked with guilt after Melissa's disappearance – had faced accusations that she had possibly killed her missing daughter and hidden

▲ *A missing person poster for Melissa Highsmith. Photograph: Courtesy of the Highsmith family*

the crime.

"My mom did the best she could with the limited resources she had – she couldn't risk getting fired, so she trusted the person who said they'd care for her child," Sharon Highsmith's statement said. "I'm grateful … we have vindication for my mom."

The family statement said Melissa's mother, her father Jeffrie Highsmith, and her siblings – Garner, Sharon Highsmith, Rebecca Del Bosque, and Jeff Highsmith – all had a simple message for people searching for missing loved ones.

"Never give up," the statement said. "Chase every lead."

Meta fined €265m over data protection breach that hit more than 500m users

Dan Milmo and agencies

Facebook's owner has been fined €265m (£230m) by the Irish data watchdog after a breach that resulted in the details of more than 500 million users being published online.

The Data Protection Commission (DPC) said Meta had infringed two articles of the EU's data protection laws after details of Facebook users from around the world were scraped from public profiles in 2018 and 2019.

The data appeared on a hacking website last year, prompting an investigation by the DPC, which is responsible for regulating Meta across the EU. The watchdog said a "significant" number of the users were from the EU.

In addition to the fine, it "imposed a reprimand and an order" requiring Meta to "bring its processing into compliance by taking a range of specified remedial actions within a particular timeframe".

In a statement Meta said: "We made changes to our systems during the time in question, including removing the ability to scrape our features in this way using phone numbers. Unauthorised data scraping is unacceptable and against our rules."

▲ *The data appeared on a hacking website last year. Photograph: Godofredo A Vásquez/AP*

The punishment brings the total amount of fines imposed on Meta by the DPC to nearly €1bn since September last year. In September Meta was fined €405m for letting teenagers set up Instagram accounts that publicly displayed their phone numbers and email addresses, while in March the watchdog fined Meta €17m for further GDPR breaches and in September last year it fined Meta's WhatsApp €225m over "severe" and "serious" infringements of GDPR.

However, one legal expert questioned whether strong enforcement of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation would have the deterrent effect that it intended.

"By any measure, these are significant fines," said David Hackett, head of data protection in the Ireland office of law firm Addleshaw Goddard. "GDPR envisaged the imposition of such fines in part to serve as a deterrent to other companies which might consider breaching the law. We are likely to see increased debate about whether such fines actually influence corporate behaviour or if some companies simply see them as an added cost of doing business."

The DPC regulates Apple, Google, TikTok and other technology platforms owing to the location of their EU headquarters in Ireland. It currently has 40 inquiries open into such companies, including 13 involving Meta.

The Irish regulator said in a statement that other relevant EU regulators agreed with the decision issued on Monday after it shared a draft ruling with them last month under the bloc's "one-stop shop" system of regulating large multinationals.

The world needs independent journalism, now more than ever

Support The Guardian at gu.com/support

The Guardian

Triple homicide suspect was sheriff's deputy who drove across US to meet girl, police say

Associated Press

The suspect in a triple homicide in southern California who died in a shootout with police was a Virginia law enforcement officer who police believe drove across the country to meet a teenage girl before killing three members of her family.

Austin Lee Edwards, 28, also probably set fire to the family's home in Riverside, California, on the day of the shooting on Friday before leaving with the girl, the Riverside police department said in a news release.

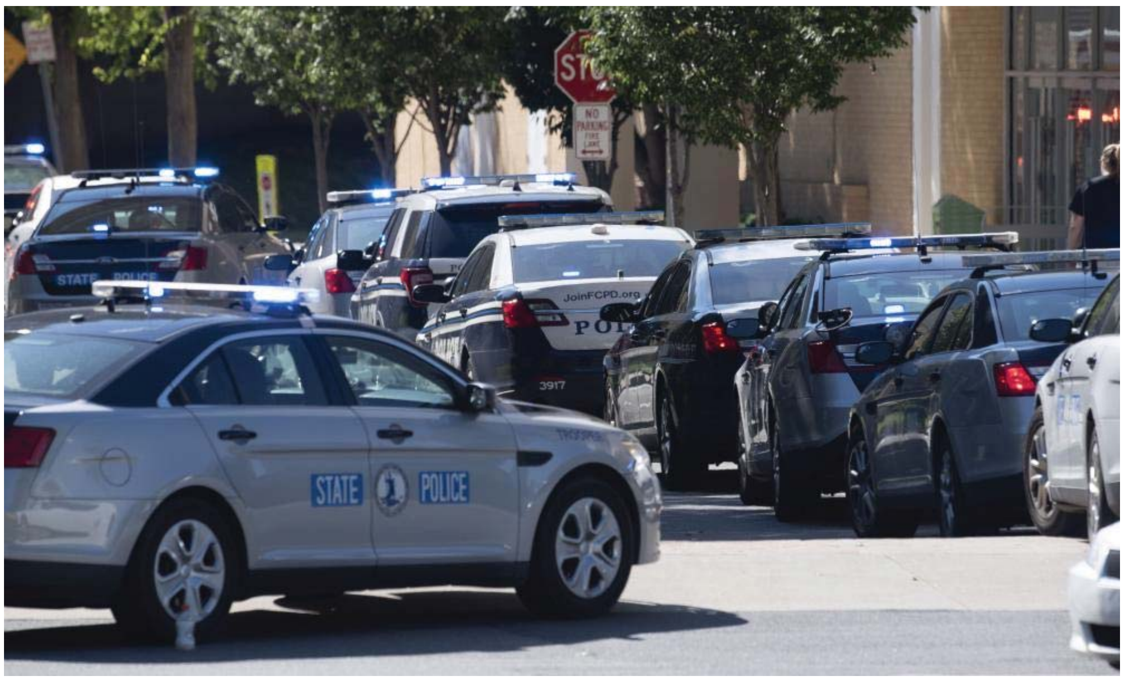
Deputies exchanged gunfire with and fatally shot Edwards after locating him with the teenager later that day, the San Bernardino county sheriff's department and Riverside police said in news releases.

Until last month, Edwards was a Virginia state police trooper, and was recently hired as a sheriff's deputy in that state, spokespersons said.

Edwards, a resident of North Chesterfield, Virginia, met the girl online and obtained her personal information by deceiving her with a false identity, known as "catfishing", Riverside police said.

The bodies found in the home were identified as the girl's grandparents and mother: Mark Winek, 69, his wife, Sharie Winek, 65, and their 38-year-old daughter, Brooke Winek. Police said the exact causes of their deaths remain under investigation.

The teenager was unharmed and taken into protective custody by the Riverside county department of public social services, Riverside police said.



▲ *Virginia state police cars. Until last month, the suspect was a Virginia state police trooper. Photograph: Cliff Owen/AP*

Police in Riverside, about 50 miles (80km) south-east of downtown Los Angeles, received a call for a welfare check on Friday morning concerning a man and woman involved in a disturbance near a car. Investigators later determined the two people were Edwards and the teenager, whose age was not released.

Dispatchers were alerted to smoke and a possible structure fire a few houses away from the disturbance. The Riverside fire department discovered three adults lying in the front entryway.

The cause of the fire was under investigation, but appeared to have been intentionally set, police said.

Ron Smith, a longtime friend of the victim's family, said he had met Mark Winek three decades ago when they were both coaching baseball at Corona high school. Smith told the Riverside Press-Enterprise that Winek was a beloved figure in the local school sports community, respected by athletes and coaches alike.

"It's a shock," Smith said. "He's a dear friend. There's going to be a hole in my heart that's going to be hard to fill."

Riverside authorities distributed a description of Edwards's vehicle to law enforcement agencies and several hours later, police located the car with Edwards and the teenager in Kelso, an unincorporated area of San Bernardino county. Edwards fired gunshots and was killed by deputies returning fire, police said.

Edwards was hired by the Virginia state police and entered the police academy in July 2021, the Virginia state police public relations manager, Corinne Geller, told the Associated Press in an email. He graduated as a trooper on 21 January 2022, and was assigned to Henrico county within the agency's Richmond division until his resignation on 28 October.

On 16 November, Edwards was hired as a deputy sheriff in Washington county, Virginia, the sheriff's office said in a statement.

During the hiring process, "no employers disclosed any troubles, reprimands, or internal investigations pertaining to Edwards," the statement said.

"It is shocking and sad to the entire law enforcement community that such an evil and wicked person could infiltrate law enforcement while concealing his true identity as a computer predator and murderer. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Winek family, their friends, officers and all of those affected by this heinous crime," the Washington county sheriff, Blake Andis, said.

The sheriff's office was assisting California agencies in the investigation.

The Riverside police chief, Larry Gonzalez, called the case "yet another horrific reminder of the predators existing online who prey on our children".

"If you've already had a conversation with your kids on how to be safe online and on social media, have it again. If not, start it now to better protect them," Gonzalez said.

An online fundraising campaign was launched on Monday to help cover funeral expenses and support the victims' families.

The kidnapping and killings were reminiscent of the 2013 abduction of 16-year-old Hannah Marie Anderson in National City, California. The bodies of the girl's mother and brother were found in the burned home of the suspect, 40-year-old James DiMaggio. Hannah was found alive in Idaho, where DiMaggio was killed by FBI agents during a shootout.

'Publishing is not a crime': media groups urge US to drop Julian Assange charges

Jim Waterson Media editor

The US government must drop its prosecution of the WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange because it is undermining press freedom, according to the media organisations that first helped him publish leaked diplomatic cables.

Twelve years ago today, the Guardian, the New York Times, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, and El País collaborated to release excerpts from 250,000 documents obtained by Assange in the "Cablegate" leak. The material, leaked to WikiLeaks by the then American soldier Chelsea Manning, exposed the inner workings of US diplomacy around the world.

The editors and publishers of the media organisations that first published those revelations have come together to publicly oppose plans to charge Assange under a law designed to prosecute first world war spies.

"Publishing is not a crime," they said, saying the prosecution is a direct attack on media freedom.

Assange has been held in Belmarsh prison in south London since his arrest at the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2019. He had spent the previous seven years living inside the diplomatic premises to avoid arrest after failing to surrender to a UK court on matters relating to a separate case.

▲ *Julian Assange speaks to the media from the balcony of the Ecuadorian embassy in London in May 2017. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images*

The then UK home secretary, Priti Patel, approved Assange's extradition to the US in June but his lawyers are appealing against this decision.

Under Barack Obama's leadership, the US government indicated it would not prosecute Assange for the leak in 2010 because of the precedent it would set. The media outlets are now appealing to the administration of President Joe Biden – who was vice-president at that time – to drop the charges.

The full letter sent by the media organisations

Publishing is not a crime: The USgovernment should end its prosecution of Julian Assange for publishing secrets.

Twelve years ago, on November28th 2010, our five international media outlets –the New York Times, the Guardian, Le Monde, El País and Der Spiegel – published a series of revelations in cooperation with WikiLeaks that made the headlines around the globe.

"Cablegate", a set of 251,000 confidential cables from the USstate-department, disclosed corruption, diplomatic scandals and spy affairs on an international scale.

In the words ofthe New York Times, the documents told "the unvarnished story of how the government makes its biggest decisions, the decisions that cost the country most heavily in lives and money". Even now in 2022, journalists and historians continue to publish new revelations, using the unique trove of documents.

For Julian Assange, publisher of WikLeaks, the publication of "Cablegate" and several other related leaks had the most severe consequences. On April12th

Continued *on page 7*

Continued from page 6

2019, Assange was arrested in London on a US arrest warrant, and has now been held for three and a half years in ahigh-security British prison usually used for terrorists and members of organised crime groups. He faces extradition to the US and a sentence of up to 175 years in an Americanmaximum-security prison.

This group of editors and publishers, all of whom had worked with Assange, felt the need to publicly criticise his conduct in 2011 when unredacted copies of the cables were released, and some of us are concerned about the allegations in the indictment that he attempted to aid in computer intrusion of a classified database. But we come together now to express our grave concerns about the continued prosecution of Julian Assange for obtaining and publishing classified materials.

The Obama-Bidenadministration, in office during the WikiLeaks publication in 2010, refrained from indicting Assange, explaining that they would have had to indict journalists from major news outlets too. Their position placed a premium on press freedom, despite its uncomfortable consequences. Under Donald Trump however, the position changed. The DoJ relied on an old law, the Espionage Act of 1917 (designed to prosecute potential spies during worldwarone), which has never been used to prosecute a publisher or broadcaster.

This indictment sets a dangerous precedent, and threatens to undermine America'sfirstamendment and the freedom of the press.

Obtaining and disclosing sensitive information when necessary in the public interest is a core part of the daily work of journalists. If that work is criminalised, our public discourse and our democracies are made significantly weaker.

Twelve years after the publication of "Cablegate", it is time for the USgovernment to end its prosecution of Julian Assange for publishing secrets.

Publishing is not a crime.

The editors and publishers of:The New York TimesThe GuardianLe MondeDer SpiegelEl País

Top-flight recovery: the inspiring comeback of the California condor

Patrick Greenfield

▲ California condors at a watering hole in the Ventana Wilderness, California. The bird is making an impressive comeback from near extinction three decades ago. Photograph: Marcio José Sánchez/AP

Despite being the largest flying bird in North America, with a wingspan of up to three metres, you would have been hard pushed to see a California condor in the wild in the 1980s. In a last-ditch effort to save the birds, after decades of persecution and population collapse, the few remaining were captured in 1987 for a multimillion-dollar intensive conservation programme.

Today, there are more than 200 in the wild, and local people are already starting to notice. In May 2021, about 10% of the entire population of the birds in the Golden State decided to roost on a woman's home in Tehachapi, southern California, damaging her decking with "concrete-like" excrement, an incident that went viral on Twitter when her daughter posted photos.

Amid the ominous warnings about the collapse of Earth's web of life and the consequences for human civilisation, the California condor has become a powerful symbol of what conservation can achieve.

Several studies have shown that the continued decline of biodiversity around the world is not an inevitability. Alongside the California condor, the Iberian lynx, Przewalski's horse and Puerto Rican amazon parrot are among 48 saved from extinction by conservationists.

A new metric published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) last year, known as thre Green Status of Species, is helping scientists plot a path to recovery for threatened animals and plants, not just halt their extinction. It estimates the California condor, despite still being listed as critically endangered on the IUCN red list, has the potential for "a significant rebound over the next century" across its previous range from British Columbia to Baja California, giving hope to many more of the one million species threatened with extinction.

"Extinction risk, which we've used to measure conservation progress for decades, is a very absolute thing. A species is either at risk of extinction or it's not. Recovery, however, is relative," says Molly Grace, a University of Oxford researcher who led the development of the IUCN's green status tool. "Every species exists in different abundances and different distributions across the planet, so recovery has to be measured relatively."

The pink pigeon, the burrowing bettong and Sumatran rhino were among the first 181 species to be assessed by 200 scientists from 171 institutions in the decade-long effort to develop the green status metric, which looked at historical population size, present-day distribution, the success of previous conservation efforts and viable habitat.

The path to recovery is precarious. For the California condor, lead poisoning from the accidental ingestion of bullets used by hunters remains a threat and is responsible for about 50% of all known causes of death of the birds. The heavy metal builds up in their bodies over time as they eat carrion, meaning they often do not survive, even if treated.

California became the first state to introduce a ban on lead ammunition to protect wildlife, in 2019, while in Arizona and Utah, where condors have been reintroduced around the Vermilion Cliffs, hunters purchasing big-game permits have been given $50 worth of lead-free ammunition to help protect the birds.

Just as in South America, where the condor is an important Inca symbol alongside the puma and snake, America's largest wild birds are sacred in California. In the north of the state, the Yurok people are working with the authorities to continue its recovery.

Joseph L James, chairman of the Yurok tribe, told the Guardian earlier this year: "Condor reintroduction is a real-life manifestation of our cultural commitment to restore and protect the planet for future generations."

▲ California condors on Cinda Mickols's porch railing in Tehachapi. Photograph: Cinda Mickols/AP

Find more age of extinction coverage here, and follow biodiversity reporters Phoebe Weston and Patrick Greenfield on Twitter for all the latest news and features

> *Extinction risk is a very absolute thing. Recovery, however, is relative*
>
> *Molly Grace, researcher*

Donald Trump 'shied away from criticising Nick Fuentes'

Hugo Lowell in Washington

▲ Nick Fuentes, shown in November 2020, had dinner at Mar-a-Lago with Donald Trump and Kanye West. Fuentes has since said the future of the country 'isn't Donald Trump'. Photograph: Nicole Hester/AP

Donald Trump repeatedly refused to disavow the outspoken antisemite and white supremacist Nick Fuentes after they spoke over dinner at his Mar-a-Lago resort, rejecting the advice from advisers over fears he might alienate a section of his base, two people familiar with the situation said.

The former US president was urged publicly and privately to denounce Fuentes in the aftermath of the dinner, which included the performer Ye, previously known as Kanye West, who has also recently been propagating antisemitic remarks.

But Trump eschewed making outright disavowals of Fuentes, the people said, and none of the statements from the campaign or on his Truth Social account included criticism of Fuentes, despite efforts from advisers who reached Trump over the Thanksgiving holiday.

Trump ultimately made clear that he fundamentally did not want to criticise Fuentes – a product of his dislike of confrontation and his anxiety that it might antagonise a devoted part of his base – and became more entrenched in his obstinance the more he was urged to do so.

Across three statements on Friday, Trump initially sought only to play down the dinner and made no mention of Fuentes or his views, before saying angrily in a post on his Truth Social website that evening that Ye "expressed no antisemitism" and "I didn't know Nick Fuentes".

The line about not knowing Fuentes was the closest Trump came to acknowledging the offensive nature of the dinner, under pressure from advisers who warned him that being associated with a racist and Holocaust denier could further damage his personal brand as well as his recently launched 2024 presidential campaign.

But even with his ignorance of Fuentes taken at face value, the statements signal Trump will give extraordinary deference to the most fringe elements of his base – even if it means potentially losing support from more moderate Republicans who have not typically cared for his indulgence of extremism.

Trump has had a long history of delaying or muting criticism of white supremacy, drawing moral equivalency in 2017 between neo-Nazis and counter-protesters at the deadly unrest in Charlottesville, Virginia, and refusing to denounce the far-right Proud Boys group at a 2020 presidential debate.

The halting response to Fuentes most closely mirrored his inability to condemn white supremacist groups after Charlottesville, the people said, when Trump faced intense criticism for not naming the rightwing groups in the bloodshed that ended with the death of a young woman.

Continued on page 8

Continued *from page 7*

When reached for comment, the Trump 2024 campaign said the former president had a record of combating antisemitism, including the appointment of a special envoy to combat antisemitism, and strengthening ties to Israel by recognising Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights.

The circumstances of the dinner at Mar-a-Lago on Tuesday, though, have been a new source of consternation for aides, who privately concede that Ye should never have been allowed to meet with Trump in the first place given his own recent antisemitic history.

Trump had intended to meet with Ye one-on-one for some time, according to a person briefed on the matter, though it was postponed around the time that Ye tweeted offensive tropes against Jews – only for it to be inexplicably rescheduled for late November.

The former president ended up meeting with Fuentes, who was at the unrest in Charlottesville, after he came along with Ye and a former Trump campaign aide, Karen Giorno. There was only a skeleton staff from Trump's "45 Office" at the property ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday.

During the dinner, the person said, Fuentes told Trump he was among the former president's supporters, but that he had been unimpressed with the 2024 campaign launch speech because it appeared stilted instead of appearing "authentic" with his ad-libs and off-the-cuff remarks.

Trump, who had told Fuentes that his advisers preferred him to read speeches as scripted, turned to Ye at one point and said: "He gets me."

Fuentes also told Trump that he thought the former president would crush other 2024 candidates in a primary, including the Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, the person said – only for Fuentes to appear to endorse DeSantis on his live stream, saying the future of the country "isn't Donald Trump".

On Saturday, US president Joe Biden said "you don't want to know what I think" when asked about Trump's guests.

On Sunday, White House deputy press secretary Andrew Bates issued a statement, saying: "Bigotry, hate, and antisemitism have absolutely no place in America – including at Mar-A-Lago. Holocaust denial is repugnant and dangerous, and it must be forcefully condemned."

And during the White House media briefing on Monday afternoon, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said: "This administration, this president totally rejects bigotry, racism, antisemitism and there is just no places for these types of vile forces in our society … We should all be condemning this."

She added: "When you say things like this, when you do not speak out against these kinds of poisonous and dangerous kind of remarks … that is also incredibly dangerous within itself."

Two people rescued from plane that crashed into power lines in Maryland

Reuters

Two seriously injured people trapped inside a small plane that crashed into high-voltage power lines near Washington DC, causing mass outages, have been rescued, authorities have said.

"Both patients have been transported to local area trauma centers with serious injuries," the Montgomery county fire chief, Scott Goldstein, said in a press briefing on Monday, adding that the two people had suffered hypothermia and orthopaedic and trauma-related injuries.

The aircraft crashed at about 5.30pm (10.30pm GMT) on Sunday in misty and wet conditions in Montgomery Village, Maryland, according to the Montgomery county fire and rescue service. It became caught up in live power lines about 100ft (30 metres) from the ground.

Goldstein said crews had been able to electrically ground the plane at about 11.30pm and it had been secured about 45 minutes later, with both patients lowered by 12.36am.

▲ *Search and rescue workers and firefighters attend the scene of the crash in Maryland. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

Most power in the county had been restored, according to Goldstein. Two hospitals were back at full capacity, he added.

The Washington-area utility company Pepco said it had restored electric service for all customers who had been affected by the incident. The company was continuing to stabilise energy infrastructure at the scene and assessing damage before beginning repairs, it added.

Crews were still working to remove the plane from power lines, the Montgomery county MD office of emergency management and homeland security said.

Goldstein had said earlier that rescue officials were in contact with the occupants by calling their cell phones.

According to the FAA, the Mooney M20J aircraft was flying from Westchester, New York, and had been due to land at Montgomery airpark, close to the crash site.

Whole Foods decision to pull Maine lobster divides activists and politicians

Maya Yang and agencies

Environmental groups are once again at loggerheads with leading politicians and fishing businesses in New England in the wake of a decision by the high-end US retail giant Whole Foods to stop selling Maine lobster.

Whole Foods recently said that it will stop selling lobster from the Gulf of Maine at hundreds of its stores around the country. The company cited decisions by a pair of sustainability organizations to take away their endorsements of the US lobster fishing industry.

The organizations, Marine Stewardship Council and Seafood Watch, both cited concerns about risks to rare North Atlantic right whales from fishing gear. Entanglement in gear is one of the biggest threats to the whales.

The decision by Whole Foods was an "important action to protect the highly endangered" whale, Virginia Carter, an associate with the Save America's Wildlife Campaign at Environment America Research & Policy Center, told the Associated Press.

"With fewer than 340 North Atlantic right whales in existence, the species is swimming toward extinction unless things turn around," Carter said.

▲ *A lobster rears its claws after being caught off Spruce Head, Maine. Photograph: Robert F Bukaty/AP*

Whole Foods said in a statement last week that it was monitoring the situation and "committed to working with suppliers, fisheries, and environmental advocacy groups as it develops".

"These third-party verifications and ratings are critical to maintaining the integrity of our standards for all wild-caught seafood found in our seafood department," it added.

In September, a major fish sustainability guide "red-listed" lobsters as seafood to avoid.

"Ordering lobster or crab should not mean jeopardising the future of critically endangered North Atlantic right whales," Gib Brogan, the campaign director of conservation pressure group Oceana told the Guardian.

Whole Foods' decision to stop selling lobster drew immediate criticism in Maine, which is home to the US's largest lobster fishing industry. The state's governor, Janet Mills, a Democrat, and its four-member congressional delegation said in a statement that Marine Stewardship Council's decision to suspend its certification of Gulf of Maine lobster came despite years of stewardship

Continued *on page 10*

When you answer to no one, you can question everything

No shareholders, advertisers or billionaire owners can censor or edit us. Our independence means we can tackle the difficult stories. But good journalism is expensive.

Support The Guardian by subscribing.

Visit gu.com/subscribe-to-change

The Guardian

Continued *from page 8*

and protection of whales by Maine fishermen.

"We are disappointed by Whole Foods' decision and deeply frustrated that the Marine Stewardship Council's suspension of the lobster industry's certificate of sustainability continues to harm the livelihoods of hardworking men and women up and down Maine's coast," the statement said.

"There has never been a right whale death attributed to Maine lobster gear; Maine lobstermen have a 150-year history of sustainability; and Maine's lobstering community has consistently demonstrated their commitment to protecting right whales," it continued.

"Despite this, the Marine Stewardship Council, with retailers following suit, wrongly and blindly decided to follow the recommendations of misguided environmental groups rather than science."

Whole Foods was not the first retailer to take lobster off the menu over sustainability concerns. HelloFresh, the meal kit company, was among numerous retailers to pledge to stop selling lobster in September after California-based Seafood Watch placed American and Canadian lobster fisheries on its "red list" of seafoods to avoid.

Houston places 2.2m people under boil water notice after plant power outage

Erum Salam

The 2.2 million people in Texas's largest city – and the US's fourth most populous – have been placed under a boil water notice since Sunday night, after a power outage caused water pressure to drop at a purification facility earlier in the day.

Some residents expressed anger at being alerted of water safety issues several hours after the outage while others complained about finding out through social media. Officials are testing whether the outage at the facility let bacteria contaminate the local drinking water supply, and results are not immediate.

Harris county, the city's largest county, issued an alert to residents on Sunday night: "A boil water notice has been issued for the City of Houston's Main Water System (TX1010013). Earlier today, the water pressure dropped below the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's required minimum of 20 PSI [pounds per square inch] during a power outage at the East Water Purification Plant … at 10.30am."

It added: "When it is no longer necessary to boil the water, the public water system officials will notify customers that the water is safe for drinking water or human consumption purposes."

▲ *A power outage caused water pressure to drop at a purification facility. Photograph: Mark Mulligan/AP*

On Monday morning Texas's environmental quality commission approved the city's plan to sample water before removing the boil water notice.

Houston's mayor, Sylvester Turner, wrote on Twitter that the earliest the boil water notice could be lifted is on Monday night or in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

School was cancelled for some students on Monday, like in the independent school districts of Houston and Aldine, as residents were advised to boil water for at least three minutes before drinking, bathing, brushing their teeth and preparing food. Other school districts in the city told students and parents that school was still in session but that bottled water would be provided.

The University of Houston told its students and employees that they "are encouraged to make plans for food and water as menu options will be limited on campus".

It is not the first time the city issued such a warning. In February 2021 a winter storm that swept the state caused its electrical grid to fail, leaving water treatment plants without power and millions of people in the dark.

Cities in the state have also issued boil water notices during hurricane season.

After Hurricane Harvey devastated their city in 2017, Houstonians narrowly avoided a boil water notice. But other nearby south-east Texas communities suffered when their water systems shut down.

Other US cities – including Flint, Michigan; Baltimore; and Jackson, Mississippi – have recently faced water safety issues that left residents without clean drinking water, calling into question the integrity of water system infrastructure in one of the wealthiest nations in the world.

Iowa Republicans threaten to move caucuses if Democrats change schedule

Adam Gabbatt in New York

Few in the US would suggest that the presidential election process should last even longer than it already does, but that is exactly what may happen if Republicans in Iowa follow through with a recent threat.

In an interview this week with NBC News, Iowa's Republican party chair said he would be prepared to move the state's caucuses – the process Iowa uses to identify its preferred presidential candidate – "to Halloween" should Democrats shake up their primary schedule.

Iowa has long been the first state in the nation to cast its vote in the Republican and Democratic presidential primary processes, but Democrats are exploring the idea of holding their first ballot elsewhere in 2024.

Clamor has been growing in the party for a different state, with a population more representative of the US as a whole, to be given the first go, with Democratic officials in Michigan, in particular, pushing for the state to be moved up in the primary calendar.

Earlier this year, the Democratic National Committee made changes to its primary process, which could allow states other than Iowa and New Hampshire, the two states which have voted first since 1972, to kick off the ballot.

▲ *Des Moines, Iowa, on 4 February 2020, when the caucuses were held. Photograph: Charlie Neibergall/AP*

The potential usurping of Iowa has left Republicans in the state furious.

"This is the Democrats that are pulling this crap and I'm telling you right now, they don't want to play chicken with me. This is pure, progressive, power politics," Jeff Kaufmann, the chair of the Iowa GOP, told NBC News.

"If, for some reason, California and New York dictate policy for the entire DNC and they give the middle finger to Iowa and the midwest – if that happens, we will be first," Kaufmann said.

"I'll move this thing to Halloween if that's what it takes."

Given the first vote is usually held in January, Kaufmann's threat has the appearance of hyperbole, yet since Kaufmann also heads the national Republican committee, as NBC reported, that oversees its presidential schedule, he would potentially have scope to change the date of the Iowa caucuses.

After changing its rules in April, in July the DNC postponed a vote on whether Iowa and New Hampshire should continue to be the first states in the calendar. According to US census data, 84% of Iowans identify as "white alone, not Hispanic or Latino", and 89% identify the same way in New Hampshire. Nationwide, 59% of Americans identify as "white alone", according to the census.

The Michigan primary was held on 10 March in 2020, by which time only three candidates – Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders and Tulsi Gabbard, remained in the race. Biden won the Michigan primary convincingly, and carried the

Continued *on page 11*

Continued from page 10

state in the presidential election.

Democrats in Michigan have since been lobbying to be moved forward in the calendar, and that case was strengthened by results there in the midterms. Democrats gained control of the state house and senate for the first time in 40 years, and Gretchen Whitmer retained the governorship.

Going first in the primaries brings prestige and exposure, with TV channels and newspapers providing daily updates from early states for weeks, and also brings a financial boost in the depths of winter. The Daily Iowan reported that campaigns spent $7.2m in Iowa in January 2020 alone – 14.7% of the state's entire gross domestic product for that month.

Canadian man arrested for 1983 killings of two women after DNA breakthrough

Associated Press in Toronto

A 61-year-old Canadian man has been charged in the cold case killings of two women who were found dead in their Toronto homes within months of each other almost four decades ago.

The Toronto police chief, James Ramer, said Joseph George Sutherland, of Moosonee, Ontario, was arrested on Thursday and charged with first-degree murder in the killings of Erin Gilmour and Susan Tice in 1983.

Both women had been sexually assaulted and stabbed to death, Ramer said. Although their bodies were discovered four months apart, detectives linked the deaths using DNA technology in 2000, and investigators suspected the same man in both cases, he said.

Police said Gilmour was a 22-year-old aspiring fashion designer and Tice was a 45-year-old mother of four who held a master's degree in social work and worked with disadvantaged children.

"We're all very happy an arrest has been made in the vicious murders of Erin and Susan Tice," said Sean McCowan, Erin's brother. "This is a day that I and we've been waiting almost an entire lifetime for."

▲ *The Toronto police chief, James Ramer, speaks at a press conference on Monday about the arrest of a suspect in the 1983 killings of Erin Gilmour and Susan Tice. Photograph: Chris Young/AP*

In 2019, genetic samples in the case were sent to a lab in Texas, where the results were cross-referenced with samples uploaded to Family Tree DNA, a Houston-based commercial genetic testing company, police said.

From there, detectives worked backwards, building a family tree of the suspect's nearest common relatives, said Det Sgt Steve Smith. As they closed in on Sutherland, police served him with a warrant for his DNA to test directly against the samples recovered from the crime scenes.

Smith said the same lab had helped police in a different case, analyzing DNA samples to identify the man who likely killed nine-year-old Christine Jessop in 1984. Police said they would have charged that man with murder, but a lawyer for the Jessop family said he died by suicide in 2015.

Smith said Sutherland had not previously been a suspect or person of interest in the deaths of Gilmour and Tice, and that police would not have connected him without the DNA technology.

Toronto police said they will now investigate whether Sutherland is connected to any other unsolved cases from the past 39 years. Detectives are also reaching out to police services across the province where the man might have lived or visited, Smith said.

Officers with the Ontario provincial police arrested Sutherland without incident on Thursday in Moosonee.

Smith said Sutherland was living in Toronto at the time of the deaths. He said there is a publication ban on the case and declined to release more details.

Sutherland is next set to appear in court on 9 December.

Angelina Jolie criticises governments over inaction on wartime sexual violence

Sarah Johnson

Angelina Jolie has decried the lack of action by governments to support survivors of wartime rape as "deeply painful and frustrating".

The actor and UN special envoy for refugees, who launched the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) with the then foreign secretary William Hague in 2012, said there had not been "nearly enough" progress on bringing perpetrators to justice, prioritising survivors' needs or ending impunity.

Writing in the Guardian today, she said: "There has been some progress … but it has not been nearly enough to meet the needs of survivors, or to deter perpetrators from using rape as a weapon of war in almost every new conflict in the past decade.

"Despite the commitments made, we have not seen significant, lasting action at the global level. This is deeply painful and frustrating."

As the British government marks the 10th anniversary of PSVI with a conference in London, Jolie said: "We meet and discuss these horrors and agree that they should never be allowed to happen again. We promise to draw – and to hold – that line.

"But when it comes to hard choices about how to implement these promises, we run into the same problems time and again. We run into some security council members abusing their veto power, such as in the case of Syria. We run into economic and political interests being put first, treating some conflicts as more important than others. And we run into a lack of political will, meaning that governments in recent years have downgraded the importance of efforts to combat warzone sexual violence, despite the direct link to international peace and security."

Ministers and representatives from 70 countries are expected to attend the two-day PSVI summit, which begins on Monday. They will be joined by survivors of violence and Nobel laureates Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege.

Tariq Ahmad, the UK prime minister's special representative for PSVI, said the conference will "drive new action", secure new commitments (including funding) and "discuss how to strengthen the global response to these crimes and how to address some of the real root causes, including gender discrimination".

The UK government announced on Monday £12.5m of new funding over three years to tackle violence. Most of the money will be used to support survivors.

The foreign secretary, James Cleverly, said: "The very threat of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war should bring immediate international condemnation and swift action to stop those attacks before they start.

"So today, we stand in solidarity to support survivors and to bring justice. But also to send an unequivocal message to those who order, allow or perpetrate sexual violence: we will not tolerate it and we will push for perpetrators to be prosecuted."

But Nimco Ali, the chief executive of the Five Foundation, an organisation working for women and girls around the world, said pledging money was not enough.

"It is not enough that we see renewed commitments," she said. "It has been proven they are not sufficient or reliable. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office needs to embed change at its core and update its own systemic priorities by putting the principles of gender equality at the heart of its aid and diplomacy policies."

Ali added that money must be given to local women's organisations. "Unless international aid and foreign diplomacy strategies include unshakeable and specific financial commitments for women and girls at grassroots level – in countries where the specific instances of violence are happening – we will be back here again in 10 years' time," she said.

Eva Tabbasam, the director of Gender Action for Peace and Security, said £12.5m was "a drop in the ocean compared to the amount of money that has been cut from gender equality programming".

Last year saw a £3bn reduction in the overseas aid budget, with further cuts estimated in the next few years. An analysis of UK aid between 2019 and 2022 showed the cuts had a significant detrimental impact on women and girls' lives.

Yasmin Sooka, the chair of the UN commission on human rights in South Sudan, said the war in Ukraine meant that the organisations that survivors of sexual violence depend on in South Sudan and other countries had seen their funds cut in recent years.

"The international community needs to stop these violations in South Sudan, but in the absence of peace at least we should be able to patch up the victims," she said.

A PSVI summit held in London in 2014 – attended by 1,700 politicians, celebrities, and survivors – was criticised for costing more than five times the 2015 UK budget for tackling rape in war zones.

In 2020, a damning report by the aid watchdog said PSVI had "not fully delivered on its ambitions and is at risk of letting survivors down".

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

Support The Guardian at gu.com/support

The Guardian

Netanyahu strikes Israeli coalition deal with far-right homophobic leader

Associated Press in Jerusalem

The former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has struck a coalition deal with a far-right leader known for his homophobic rhetoric and disparaging remarks about non-Orthodox Jews, a sign of the prospective government's hardline makeup.

Netanyahu's Likud party announced on Sunday that the agreement named Avi Maoz, the leader of the ultra-nationalist Noam party, as a deputy minister, whose portfolio includes an office bolstering Jewish identity among Israelis.

The incremental step is part of Netanyahu's effort to hammer out a power-sharing agreement with his potential ultra-Orthodox and ultranationalist allies following the parliamentary election on 1 November. Netanyahu stands poised to form one of the most hardline religious and nationalist governments in Israel's history.

▲ Benjamin Netanyahu at the swearing-in ceremony of Israeli lawmakers at the Knesset in Jerusalem earlier this month. Photograph: Abir Sultan/AP

Maoz, a Jewish fundamentalist and West Bank settler, is an outspoken opponent of LGBTQ+ rights and women serving in the military, and has voiced opposition to Arabs teaching Jewish students in Israeli schools. He has denied the legitimacy of non-Orthodox Judaism, including the Reform and Conservative movements, which are marginal in Israel but dominant in the US and have long provided the country with financial and diplomatic support.

Maoz said in a statement that the deal with Likud was the "first step in returning the soul to the country".

Maoz's Noam faction ran in the last elections on a joint ticket with Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionism party, which won 14 seats in the 120-member Israeli parliament, the Knesset, making it the third-largest faction.

▲ Activists holding election campaign banners in support of Avi Maoz near the Sea of Galilee in August. Photograph: Atef Safadi/

Netanyahu's Likud party has yet to finalise its coalition agreement with all its prospective allies and form a government.

Cannabis oil failed to improve pain or quality of life in palliative care cancer patients, study shows

Melissa Davey

The first high quality study looking at the impact of cannabidiol oil on palliative care patients with advanced cancer found it did not improve their pain, depression, anxiety, or quality of life.

Palliative care is one of the conditions for which medicinal cannabis has been approved in Australia.

The trial, led by the Mater hospital and the University of Queensland, studied the effects of cannabidiol oil, also known as CBD, on the relief of pain, depression, anxiety and quality of life on 144 patients receiving palliative care for cancer. The trial was double-blinded, which meant neither the researchers nor the participants knew whether they were getting medicinal cannabis or a placebo.

All patients also received standard palliative care throughout the trial period.

"The trial found there was no detectable effect of CBD on change in physical or emotional functioning, overall quality of life, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, pain, dyspnoea or appetite loss," lead author of the study and the director of palliative and supportive care at Mater, Prof Janet Hardy, said.

But she added that the study only examined the effect of CBD.

"The cannabis plant is very complex and contains a large number of cannabinoids and other compounds," she said. "The two most prominent cannabinoids are CBD, which is cannabidiol, and THC, which is the one that makes you high when you smoke a joint.

▲ The medicinal cannabis study examined the effects of CBD which does not have any psychoactive impact on patients. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon newsletters for your daily news roundup

"Our next study will look at a combination of CBD and THC to see if you need to have THC to get any benefit from medicinal cannabis. The problem with that is CBD is very popular because it doesn't have the psychoactive effects. It means you can drive and do other activities while on it, whereas it's illegal to drive on THC, whether it's taken for recreational or medicinal purposes."

CBD may also be useful for the treatment of cancer-related symptoms not examined in the study, she said, such as insomnia. Despite the lack of evidence of benefit, 36% of the study participants decided to buy a medicinal cannabis product after the trial, despite being unaware if they were taking the CBD or placebo. Hardy said it may be that CBD contributes to a greater feeling of general wellbeing, even if it did not improve specific symptoms.

Hardy said the study aimed to fill the gap in scientific evidence supporting the use of medicinal cannabis for pain relief and symptom distress due to cancer.

"The best way to describe the uptake of medicinal cannabis following its legalisation was as a social phenomenon," she said.

"Everyone wanted it, but there was little evidence to guide its usage. Usually, new products entering the market have gone through extensive pre-clinical studies regarding best dosage and usage, however medicinal cannabis entered the market with very little guidance."

The findings have been published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology.

A professor of pharmacology at Macquarie Medical School, Mark Connor, said "this might seem like a disappointing conclusion, but it's an important one". The study had found no adverse effects from CBD oil, he said, suggesting CBD is well tolerated and can be trialled on other patient groups with different conditions.

"A trial like this is certainly a stepping stone to potentially larger trials that may be designed in a way that can focus on more targeted areas where cannabinoids may have an effect, for example on more specific symptoms like insomnia, or even in specific types of cancers," he said. "And what we can see from this study is CBD seems well-tolerated, and is unlikely to make things worse."

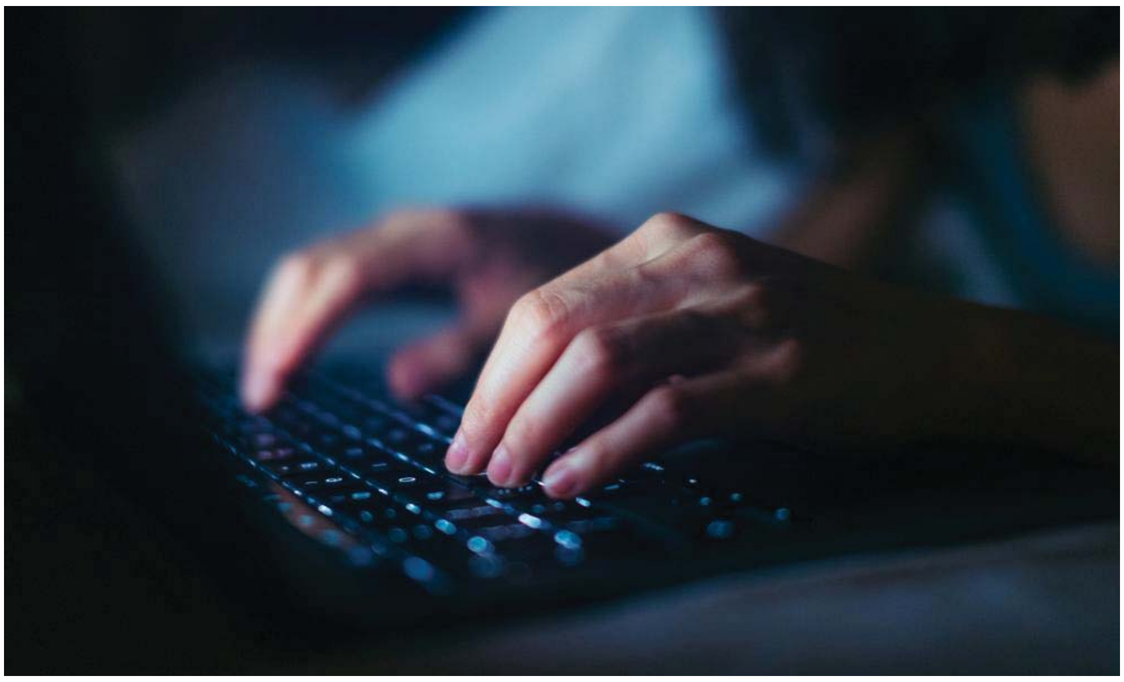
The only thing that should influence the news is the news

Support The Guardian at gu.com/support

The Guardian

Social media firms face big UK fines if they fail to stop sexist and racist content

Dan Milmo Global technology editor



▲ Labour said the government had 'bowed to vested interests'. Photograph: Oscar Wong/Getty

Social media platforms that breach pledges to block sexist and racist content face the threat of substantial fines under government changes to the online safety bill announced on Monday.

Under the new approach, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter must also give users the option of avoiding content that is harmful but does not constitute a criminal offence. This could include racism, misogyny or the glorification of eating disorders.

Ofcom, the communications regulator, will have the power to fine companies up to 10% of global turnover for breaches of the act. Facebook's parent, Meta, posted revenues of $118bn (£99bn) last year.

A harmful communications offence has, however, been dropped from the legislation after criticism from Conservative MPs that it was legislating for "hurt feelings".

Ministers have scrappedthe provision on regulating "legal but harmful" material – such as offensive content that does not constitute a criminal offence – and are instead requiring platforms to enforce their terms and conditions for users.

If those terms explicitly prohibit content that falls below the threshold of criminality – such as some forms of abuse – Ofcom will then have the power to ensure they police them adequately.

Under another adjustment to the bill, big tech companies must offer people a way of avoiding harmful content on their platform, even if it is legal, through methods that could include content moderation or warning screens. Examples of such material include those that are abusive, or incite hatred on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sex, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

However, firms will not be able to take down content or ban a user unless the circumstances for doing so are clearly set out in the terms of service. Users will also have to be offered a right of appeal to protect against arbitrary content removal or account bans.

The revival of the much-delayed attempt to rein in tech firms comes as Meta was fined €265m on Monday for a breach of data protection law after the personal details of more than 500 million people were published online.

The bill, which returns to parliament on 5 December after being paused in July, also contains new provisions on protecting children. Overall, the legislation imposes a duty of care on tech firms to shield children from harmful content, but the updated bill now includes provisions such as requiring social media companies to publish assessments of the dangers their sites pose to children. Sites that carry age limits – which for most big social media sites is 13 years old – will have to set out in their terms of service how they enforce them.

The culture secretary, Michelle Donelan, said an unregulated social media industry has "damaged our children for too long". She added: "I will bring a strengthened online afety ill back to parliament, which will allow parents to see and act on the dangers sites pose to young people. It is also freed from any threat that tech firms or future governments could use the laws as a licence to censor legitimate views."

The shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, said the government had "bowed to vested interests" by scrapping the legal but harmful provision.

"Removing 'legal but harmful' gives a free pass to abusers and takes the public for a ride. It is a major weakening, not strengthening, of the bill," she said.

"The government has bowed to vested interests, over keeping users and consumers safe."

Changes to the bill have been made in the face of warnings from Conservative MPs and some campaign groups that a prior version would encourage tech firms to be overcensorious and stifle freedom of speech.

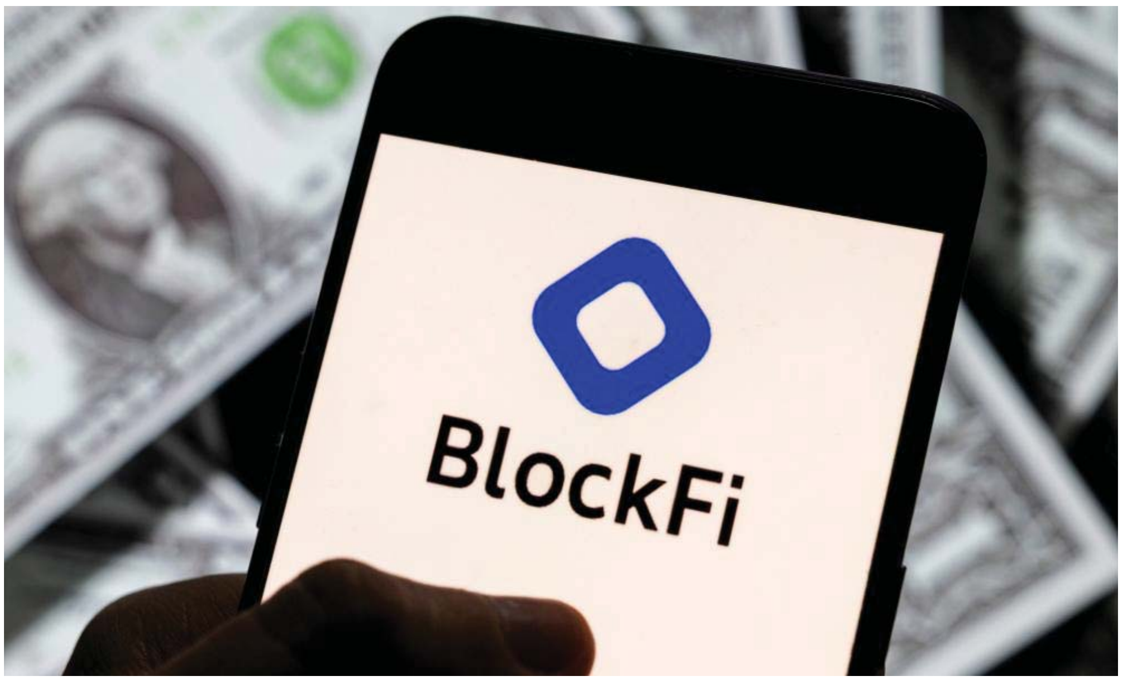
Kemi Badenoch, the trade secretary and former Tory leadership contender, criticised the bill in July, stating: "We should not be legislating for hurt feelings."

Her comments alluded to the harmful communications proposal in the draft bill, which made it an offence to send a message on social media intended to cause "psychological harm, amounting to at least serious distress". This has now been dropped and the government will no longer repeal parts of two acts – the Malicious Communications Act and the Communications Act – that it was intended to replace.

Other changes to the bill include criminalising encouragement of committing self-harm, a change that was introduced after the inquest into the death of 14-year-old Molly Russell, who died after viewing extensive amounts of harmful material on Instagram and Pinterest in 2017. Under the bill, which applies to all firms that produce user-generated content, as well as search engines, tech companies must tackle illegal content such as child sexual abuse images and terrorist material.

Crypto lender BlockFi files for bankruptcy after FTX collapse

Alex Hern UK technology editor



▲ BlockFi, which has $256.9m cash in hand, owes $275m to FTX and $30m to the US Securities and Exchange Commission, court documents showed. Photograph: Chukrut Budrul/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

The crypto lender BlockFi has become the sector's latest big operator to declare bankruptcy, as the fallout of the collapse of offshore cryptocurrency exchange FTX continues to spread.

BlockFi, which operates in a similar fashion to a conventional bank, paying interest on savings and using customer deposits to fund lending, says it has $256.9m cash in hand. According to court documents, its creditors include FTX itself, to which it owes $275m, and the US Securities and Exchange Commission(SEC), to which it owes $30m.

In a statement announcing its Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing, BlockFi said: "This action follows the shocking events surrounding FTX and associated corporate entities and the difficult but necessary decision we made as a result to pause most activities on our platform.

"Since the pause, our team has explored every strategic option and alternative available to us, and has remained laser-focused on our primary objective of doing the best we can for our clients.

"These Chapter 11 cases will enable BlockFi to stabilise the business and provide BlockFi with the opportunity to consummate a reorganisation plan that maximises value for all stakeholders, including our valued clients."

The SEC levied a $100m fine on the company in February for violating securities laws, arguing that the investment products the company offered qualified as unregistered securities. The outstanding $30m debt is apparently the unpaid portion of that fine.

BlockFi has already stumbled close to bankruptcy once already this year, in the wake of spring's crypto crash.

After chief executive Zac Prince said the company needed an injection of capital to stave off a liquidity crisis, it signed a deal with none other than FTX, which gave the company access to $400m in loans. The price of the deal was an option from FTX to buy the lender for about $240m, a sharp decline from a peak valuation of $3bn.

That option was never exercised, and the collapse of the cryptocurrency exchange sparked a bank run at BlockFi, seen by customers as dangerously entangled with Sam Bankman-Fried's company, that proved terminal. Without the ability to draw on the credit line, nor access its own funds stored on the FTX platform, BlockFi was forced to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Monkeypox to be renamed mpox to avoid stigma, says WHO

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

Monkeypox has been given a new name by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has announced the disease will now be called "mpox" in a bid to help tackle discrimination and stigma.

The WHO announced its intention to rename the disease in June after concerns were raised that its original name is misleading, stigmatising and discriminatory, with a crowd-sourcing effort to find a new name announced in August.

Now the WHO has revealed that the reference to non-human primates is to be dropped.

"Mpox will become a preferred term, replacing monkeypox, after a transition period of one year," the UN health agency said in a statement. "This serves to mitigate the concerns raised by experts about confusion caused by a name change in the midst of a global outbreak."

The WHO added that a key issue in choosing the new name was its usability in different languages, while scientific appropriateness, pronounceability, and absence of geographical or zoological references were among the other considerations.

▲ *In May, the disease began spreading rapidly around the world. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters*

The virus that causes mpox was first identified in captive monkeys in 1958. However, the natural reservoir of the disease is unknown and it is commonly found in rodents. What's more, scientists have raised concerns over the way outbreaks are covered by the media, and the naming of different strains of the virus by reference to various parts of Africa.

"In the context of the current global outbreak, continued reference to, and nomenclature of this virus, being African is not only inaccurate but is also discriminatory and stigmatising," the experts wrote in June.

The different strains of mpox were subsequently renamed clade I, clade II and clade IIb.

Similar concerns arose with the arrival of new variants during the Covid pandemic, resulting in Covid variants being given monikers based on the Greek alphabet, rather than the location in which they were first identified.

Mpox, which was first identified in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has made headlines in recent months after an unprecedented global outbreak began in May – largely among men who have sex with men.

Up to 21 November, the UK alone recorded 3,720 confirmed or probable cases, compared with seven between 2018 and 2021.

Prof Paul Hunter of the University of East Anglia welcomed the move by the WHO. "Given that monkeys are not a primary source of the virus the new name is less confusing for people who do not know the background to this infection," he said.

"It is however a shame that one of the driving forces for making this change now has been the 'racist and stigmatising language' used online. Hopefully such language will now stop."

Iranian artists call for boycott of cultural institutions with links to regime

David Batty

Dozens of Iranian artists have called for an international boycott of cultural institutions run by or affiliated with the Islamic Republic in protest against the regime's worsening human rights abuses.

The call by artists, writers, film-makers and academics living in Iran and among its diaspora comes amid growing anti-government art activism by Iranians inside and outside the country after the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini.

More than 6,000 Iranian cultural figures have signed a statement in support of art students in the country who are facing arrest and intimidation for taking part in the protests, which began 10 weeks ago.

The organisers of that letter have now published a plea for their peers around the world to "boycott governmental institutions of the Islamic state of Iran and their covert affiliates, and prevent them from having any presence in international arenas of arts, culture and education".

They condemned the "increasingly brutal, violent and deadly state crackdown" against anti-government protesters, in which an estimated 300 people have been killed and 14,000 arrested.

One of the core members of the group has called for direct action against arts organisations that take funding from the Iranian regime, similar to the protests mounted against museums and galleries funded by the Sackler family, benefactors descended from the American makers of addictive opioid prescription drugs.

▲ *Shirin Neshat's Woman Life Freedom at Piccadilly Circus in London. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock*

Vali Mahlouji, a London-based curator, said this could involve lobbying international art fairs to not exhibit certain Iranian galleries. "We know that some private Iranian galleries are connected to the money systems of the Iranian state, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Council," said Mahlouji. "They need to be boycotted."

The artist Jinoos Taghizadeh, who took part in street protests in Tehran after Amini's death and was teargassed, said some seemingly independent galleries "have been the money-laundering arm of the government" and have "tried to depoliticise [Iranian] artists". "I support and expect international cultural institutions to boycott them," she said.

Provoked by Amini's death while in police custody following charges that she was wearing the hijab inappropriately, artists in Iran have created public installations that reflect the brutality of the regime.

In October, an anonymous artist created "Tehran sinking in blood" by dyeing fountains in parks red. In response to a crackdown on demonstrators at Tehran's Sharif University, two anonymous female artists hung red nooses from trees in Daneshjoo Park.

"This is a society saying we are terrorised," said Mahlouji. "There is a big performative response: people tying themselves up; red ink being poured on pictures of the founder of the Islamic Republic [Ayatollah Khomeini]; red paint being thrown at buildings; even urinating outside art galleries which have kept themselves open when artists demanded that they close down."

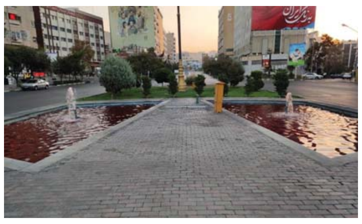
In New York last month, the Anonymous Artist Collective for Iran unfurled 12 red banners inside the Guggenheim Museum covered with stencils depicting Amini and the words "Woman, Life, Freedom" in English and Kurdish.

Taghizadeh, who is now in Canada, raised the plight of art students in Iran whom she said "have been very brave and creative despite all the repressions, arrests, kidnappings". Videos of their anti-government performances and protests on campus have gone viral on social media.

She said: "They were constantly threatened by the police and university security, but the performance of their music and protest songs and their publication on social media both encouraged the protesters and brought the voice of protest to other cities and outside Iran."

Taghizadeh called on international galleries and museums to exhibit Iranian art that supports the spirit of the "women, life, freedom" movement, rather than shows that reinforce "the exotic stereotypes of the Middle East and the Islamic world".

The artist Shirin Neshat, who last month showed a digital art piece called Woman Life Freedom at Piccadilly



▲ *Fountains in Fatemi Square in Tehran with water dyed red. Photograph: UGC/AFP/Getty Images*

Circus, London, and at Pendry West Hollywood in Los Angeles to highlight worsening human rights abuses in Iran, said: "We are not just a bunch of oppressed artists trying to get the western culture to feel sorry for us. We're teaching them that it is time to wake up and understand that culture plays a big part in the political fabric of our world."

Neshat, who signed the letter in support of Iranian art students, said she was "learning so much from them". "Not only by their resistance and protests, but by their imagination," she said. "How within the parameters that they're dealing with they continue to be imaginative and creative in fighting back."

The artist, who in 1996 was banned from returning to Iran, added: "We see these young people who are completely fearless facing tyranny. You really question your own state of mind as an Iranian who has never been able to live without fear for so many years. It's extremely hopeful to have these young people who are saying no more fear."

Action is needed right now to end sexual violence in conflict

Angelina Jolie

Almost a decade ago, more than 150 countries joined the global declaration of commitment to end sexual violence in conflict. They promised to bring perpetrators to justice, to put survivors' needs first, and to take other practical steps to end impunity.

These were lofty goals and there has been some progress, including a few prosecutions at the national level, the adoption of the Murad Code and the establishment of the Global Survivors Fund. But it has not been nearly enough to meet the needs of survivors, or to deter perpetrators from using rape as a weapon of war in almost every new conflict in the past decade.

Despite the commitments made, we have not seen significant, lasting action at the global level. This is deeply painful and frustrating. Conflict-related sexual violence has been reported in at least 18 countries in the past year alone, from the Americas to Asia and from Europe to Africa.

We are speaking about crimes of extreme brutality. Assaults on women and men in front of their families. The gang-rape of children – who were the victims in nearly half of all the cases the UN verified last year. Sexual violence in conflict makes peace harder to achieve – and less stable. It increases the risk of domestic violence. It drives displacement. It stops girls going to school. It leaves scars of trauma and stigma that affect whole societies and cross generations.

We meet and discuss these horrors and agree that they should never be allowed to happen again. We promise to draw – and to hold – that line. But when it comes to hard choices about how to implement these promises, we run into the same problems time and again. We run into some security council members abusing their veto power, such as in the case of Syria. We run into economic and political interests being put first, treating some conflicts as more important than others. And we run into a lack of political will, meaning that governments in recent years have downgraded the importance of efforts to combat war-zone sexual violence, despite the direct link to international peace and security.

▲ *A demonstration in Bengaluru, India on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November. Photograph: Manjunath Kiran/AFP/Getty Images*

For all our awareness of these crimes, less than 1% of humanitarian relief is spent on preventing or responding to sexual and gender-based violence, even though sexual violence is endemic in situations where people are displaced by conflict or disaster.

Survivors and advocates have highlighted this funding gap for years, and addressing it was one of the promises of the global declaration. The creation of a permanent international body that can help fill the accountability gap has also been discussed for years without any progress. A new, permanent, international commission to document and investigate sexual violence in conflict could support national and international investigators, prosecutors, and accountability and justice mechanisms in their work. It could act as a professional body, a repository of knowledge and data, and provide training for people involved in investigating atrocities and war crimes.

When human beings are physically assaulted in this way, there has to be a decisive global response. When there isn't, a message is sent to both the victim and the perpetrator that we don't truly regard this as a significant crime that has to be punished and prevented.

Over the next two days, government ministers, academics, civil society practitioners and survivors will come together in London for a conference to renew global political will to prevent sexual violence in conflict. It should take a hard look at what has succeeded – and what has not.

At the last conference, in London in 2014, survivors and NGOs came forward with information and solutions to impunity, from reforming militaries to developing local capacity and ensuring medical care, trauma care, livelihood support and reparations for survivors.

The conference should not be another moment when survivors have to come forward to explain their pain and suffering again, and to show their willingness to work with governments, only for countries to be unwilling to act on their commitments over the long term.

Governments and international efforts come and go. Those who remain and who fight and struggle for decades are local people – in this case, the survivors of rape, and people such as the Congolese gynaecologist and Nobel prizewinner Dr Denis Mukwege. He has treated tens of thousands of survivors of rape, despite attacks on his life, for decades.

If global leaders were willing to be even a fraction as brave and committed as Dr Mukwege – and as survivors are – then we could perhaps finally find a way to meet this crime with the response it deserves.

Angelina Jolie is an actor, co-founder of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative and a special envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

Survivors should not have to come forward to explain their pain and suffering again

Elon Musk's Twitter is fast proving that free speech at all costs is a dangerous fantasy

Nesrine Malik

Free speech absolutists are like the cocky audience of a spectator sport – they think they could do better than the players, if they were just allowed a crack at it. To them, speech should be as free as possible, period. Nowhere is their oversimplification of the issue more evident than on social media, where abuse and disinformation have created a new frontier of regulation – and with it a cohort of disingenuous free speech warriors.

These absolutists are so unaccustomed to facing consequences for their actions that they have pushed the idea that a censoring "woke" orthodoxy now prevails, and is a threat to freedom of expression. Elon Musk is among them, but since his takeover of Twitter he is having to learn quickly that free speech is not simply about saying whatever you want, unchecked, but about negotiating complicated compromises.

▲ *'Elon Musk believes Twitter has a leftwing and liberal bias that should be corrected.' Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images*

Musk arrived at Twitter with an approach that I am sure he thinks is pretty straightforward. The site, he believes, has a leftwing bias that should be corrected by allowing suspended users back on to the platform. The accounts of Donald Trump, Kanye West and Jordan Peterson have been reinstated, along with nearly all those that were suspended for falling foul of old Twitter's rules on abuse and hate speech.

This means that Twitter is about to turn into a far more unpleasant and potentially dangerous experience. Little of this appears to have anything to do with a political strategy on Musk's part. Like Trump, Musk has become the tribune of fascists and racists by way of adolescent contrarianism, an insatiable need to flaunt his control and a radicalising inability to cope with being told he's wrong on the internet. For him, "free speech" seems merely a vehicle for his delusional plan to make Twitter into a fawning "digital town square" that he presides over.

Continued *on page 16*

Continued *from page 15*

But not even the richest man in the world can pull that sort of free speech arena off. Twitter isn't sustained by previously suspended users, but by the millions of people for whom the platform feels (most of the time) like a political and cultural slipstream. Twitter has an odd social media profile. It is both extremely influential and also often quite trivial, and the coexistence of the two is what makes the site viable. Twitter is a window into the soul of politicians and opinion-makers – its style of interactive rolling commentary works well in drawing them out to post their views or engage with others, revealing personalities and politics that otherwise would be surpressed or closely edited. And it is the first resort of citizen journalists and those marshalling political protest. It also remains the only social media platform where people with little clout or profile can challenge elites directly.

But Twitter is also a solipsistic place, where even small users can become protagonists in spats that are then amplified both by the site's algorithms and a rightwing media that trawls it for telltale signs of "wokeness" or "cancel culture". For better or worse, it is Twitter's adjacency to current affairs and general political and cultural discourse that makes it, uniquely among platforms, feel *relevant*.

If you're not on Twitter, chances are that you have come across stories that started out or were precipitated there, whether it's a debate on trans rights that swirls around JK Rowling's tweets, or calls to organise street protests against dictators in the Arab world. For all these things to be possible on the same site, robust content moderation is necessary to ensure conversations don't descend into doxing (maliciously publishing someone's personal information) and hateful conduct, and that news and journalism is verifiable. In the absence of moderation, or at least the appearance of it, things fall apart pretty quickly. When a place is not fun or hospitable or truthful to users, it also becomes commercially pointless for advertisers. Since Musk took over, half of Twitter's top 100 advertisers are reported to have left the site. If things continue as they are, it is hard to see a future for the company.

The ultimate cause of that demise will be the failure of Musk to understand that for some speech to be free, other speech has to be limited. It is generally true that if a service is free then it is by definition exploitative of its users – if you are not paying for a product, the axiom goes, then you *are* the product.But in the case of social media, the regulation of your speech is the product. If a platform becomes too toxic, then it is useless for anyone except those who want an extremist ghetto of agitators. In that sense, social media is very much like society in general. Political and legal authorities are in the business of content moderation, in order to make our shared space as stable and safe as possible for a majority of people. The public and other stakeholders, such as the press, businesses and social media companies themselves, are in constant negotiations with these authorities on what those limits should be – for instance, whether religious dress is protected speech, or what constitutes incitement to violence.

Old Twitter was far from perfect, and by its own admission its algorithms favoured rightwing accounts. But it was improving because of the drag that advertisers, regulators and users were putting on its algorithmic urge to encourage antagonistic activity. The high-speed destabilisation of Musk's Twitter should be a warning to free speech absolutists. The set of curbs they object to are those that make users' experience of social media, and life in general, possible; they protect against, among other jeopardies, libel, impersonation, plagiarism, misinformation and grooming. In essence, all our free speech arguments are about finessing, rather than obliterating a system of functional restrictions.

Those with power have more leeway to define what free speech is, but they can rarely do so without limitation. Twitter's chance of survival is dependent on whether Musk chooses to accept that, like freedom of speech, his power is not absolute.

Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

Crypto will survive the FTX collapse – but more scandals will follow

Kenneth Rogoff

▲ *The collapse of Sam Bankman-Fried's FTX looks set to go down as one of the great financial debacles of all time. Photograph: Stefani Reynolds/AFP/Getty Images*

The epic collapse of wunderkind Sam Bankman-Fried's $32bn (£27bn) crypto empire, FTX, looks set to go down as one of the great financial debacles of all time. With a storyline full of celebrities, politicians, sex and drugs, the future looks bright for producers of feature films and documentaries. But, to paraphrase Mark Twain, rumours of the death of crypto itself have been much exaggerated.

True, the loss of confidence in "exchanges" such as FTX – essentially crypto financial intermediaries – almost surely means a sustained steep drop in prices for the underlying assets. The vast majority of bitcoin transactions are done "off-chain" in exchanges, not in the bitcoin blockchain itself. These financial intermediaries are vastly more convenient, require much less sophistication to use and do not waste nearly as much energy.

The emergence of exchanges was a major factor fuelling cryptocurrencies' price growth and if regulators come down hard on them, the price of the underlying tokens will fall. Accordingly, bitcoin and ethereum prices have plummeted.

But a price adjustment alone is not the end of the world. The pertinent question is whether crypto lobbyists will be able to contain the damage. Until now, their money has been speaking volumes; Bankman-Fried reportedly gave $40m to support the Democrats in the US, and his FTX colleague Ryan Salame reportedly gave $23m to Republicans. Such largesse surely helped persuade regulators around the world to follow a wait-and-see approach to crypto regulation, rather than be perceived to be stifling innovation. Well, they waited, and with the FTX crash, we must hope that they saw.

But what will they conclude? The most likely path is to improve regulation of the centralised exchanges – the firms that help individuals store and trade cryptocurrencies "off chain". The fact that a multibillion-dollar financial intermediary was not subject to normal record-keeping requirements is stupefying, no matter what one thinks about the future of crypto.

Firms would face compliance costs, but effective regulation could restore confidence, benefiting firms aiming to operate honestly, which are surely the majority, at least if one weights these exchanges by size. Greater confidence in the remaining exchanges could even lead to higher crypto prices, though much would depend on the extent to which regulatory demands, particularly on individual identities, ultimately undermined demand. After all, the major transactions currently conducted with crypto may be remittances from rich countries to developing economies and emerging markets, and capital flight in the other direction. In both cases, the parties' desire to avoid exchange controls and taxes implies a premium on anonymity.

On the other hand, Vitalik Buterin, the co-founder of the ethereum blockchain and one of the crypto industry's most influential thinkers, has argued that the real lesson of FTX's collapse is that crypto needs to return to its decentralised roots. Centralised exchanges such as FTX make holding and trading cryptocurrencies much more convenient, but at the expense of opening the door to managerial corruption, just as in any conventional financial firm. Decentralisation can mean greater vulnerability to attack, but so far the largest cryptocurrencies, such as bitcoin and ethereum, have proven resilient.

The problem with having only decentralised exchanges is their inefficiency compared with, say, Visa and Mastercard, or normal bank transactions in advanced economies. Centralised exchanges such as FTX democratised the crypto domain, allowing ordinary people without technical skill to invest and conduct transactions. It is certainly possible that ways to duplicate the speed and cost advantages of centralised exchanges eventually will be found. But this seems unlikely in the foreseeable future, making it hard to see why anyone not engaged in tax and regulatory evasion (not to mention crime) would use crypto, a point I have long emphasised.

Perhaps regulators should push toward decentralised equilibrium by requiring that exchanges know the identity of *anyone* with whom they transact, including on the blockchain. Although this may sound innocent, it would make it rather difficult to trade on the anonymous blockchain on behalf of an exchange's customers.

True, there are alternatives involving "chain analysis", whereby transactions in and out of a bitcoin wallet (account) can be algorithmically examined, allowing the underlying identity to be revealed in some cases. But if this approach was always enough, and all semblance of anonymity could always be obliterated, it is hard to see how crypto could compete with more efficient financial intermediation options.

Finally, rather than simply banning crypto intermediaries, many countries may ultimately try to ban all crypto transactions, as China and a handful of developing economies have already done. Making it illegal to transact in bitcoin, ethereum and most other crypto would not stop everyone, but it would certainly constrain the system. Just because China was among the first does not make the strategy wrong, especially if one suspects that the main transactions relate to tax evasion and crime, akin to large denomination paper currency notes such as the $100 bill.

Eventually, many other countries are likely to follow China's lead. But it is unlikely that the most important player, the US, with its weak and fragmented crypto regulation, will undertake a bold strategy any time soon. FTX may be the biggest scandal in crypto so far; sadly, it is unlikely to be the last.

Kenneth Rogoff is professor of economics and public policy at Harvard University. He was the IMF's chief economist from 2001-03.

© Project Syndicate

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

Support The Guardian at gu.com/support

The Guardian

Russia wants to break Ukraine with the cold and dark. It hasn't succeeded – so far

Simon Schlegel

On 17 November, Kyiv woke to its first snow of the winter, the now familiar sound of air-raid sirens and explosions, and the news that, yet again, scores of Russian missiles were cutting through Ukraine's skies headed for power plants and electricity substations.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure is meant to paralyse Ukrainian cities, but has led instead to a new buzz of activity as people try to adapt. Walking through the capital, you tune in to the hum of generators outside cafes that hint cooked food may be had. Other eateries have switched to cold menus and pre-brewed filter coffee, kept warm in a flask.

It's similar elsewhere; in Lviv, basement cafes double as bomb shelters bathed in candlelight. On a larger scale, the national railway has revamped its ageing diesel fleet to replace electric locomotives, and cities are preparing thousands of generator-powered warm rooms where people can escape the cold and charge their phones.

But even as individuals and businesses find creative ways to respond, it's impossible to escape the effects of Russia's missiles and drones. Ukraine says attacks have disabled nearly half of the country's energy system, increasingly cutting off heat, light, water and communications. Hospitals having to run on back-up generators means countless postponed operations. Water supplies are disrupted and blackouts curtail working hours for businesses, whose survival is vital for an economy likely to shrink by a third this year. Ukraine's $7bn IT sector, a rare success despite the war, may go into reverse unless it gets the uninterrupted electricity and high-speed internet it needs.

▲ *A cyclist passes a ruined building in Lyman, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine, 27 November 2022. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

In suburban Kyiv, Oleg has had no work for his theatrical stagedesign business since the invasion. But he faces soaring costs to ready his home for winter, and the worst three months of subzero temperatures begin about now. The backup generator in his garage guzzles six dollars worth of gasoline an hour. He has to buy firewood and use car batteries to keep the heat pumps running.

The closer to the fighting, the more extreme efforts to adapt have to be. Viktoria, a hotel owner who fled to western Ukraine from Sviatohirsk, recalls finding the Donbas town barely functioning when she went back to visit in October, after Ukrainian forces had regained control. Neighbours told her that after weeks without power, local authorities offered to rehouse them in the town's hospital, the one place with stable electricity.

When Russia began systematically bombing Ukraine's infrastructure in September, after battlefield setbacks, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said his people would always choose freedom over electricity or heating, and nearly three-quarters of Ukrainians agree. But even if the Kremlin cannot freeze Ukrainians into doubting their government's capacity to protect them, a humanitarian winter crisis will drain both Ukrainian and western resources. That will be exacerbated if more people flee, adding to the 6.5 million already displaced within Ukraine and nearly eight million Ukrainian refugees in Europe.

If Russia succeeds in rendering parts of Ukraine uninhabitable, costs will grow further. Hundreds of thousands of people uprooted by the cold and dark would leave a huge gap in an already battered economy. As in the eastern Donbas war zone since 2014, the better-off people would leave first; those most vulnerable would remain in place, and – with the economy disrupted and private support networks scattered – they would increasingly depend on humanitarian aid.

Resources that help Ukrainians adapt rather than leave therefore represent money well spent. At a national level, top of the list is air defence. Ukraine's systems have already grown more effective thanks to western support, but even a much-strengthened air defence will be stretched if Iran ships hundreds more missiles and drones to Russia, as western officials suspect. Ukrainian forces also continue to face some shortages of cold weather gear, and its western partners could continue to help fill those gaps.

In addition to war-fighting support, there are many other ways international organisations and sympathetic governments, companies, municipalities and individuals can help. Ukrainian energy providers say they are running out of equipment to restore power plants swiftly, making outages ever longer. They need spare parts, building materials and machinery – but also logistical aid in scheduling blackouts efficiently.

Civilians need blankets, boilers, ovens, heaters and generators – or, where there is a functioning market, just money they can spend on what they need most, such as expensive fuel. Those worst-hit need roofing and glazing, or at the very least plastic sheeting, to survive in damaged homes. These relatively simple and uncontroversial kinds of aid can make the difference between staying or leaving.

▲ *People charge their devices at a heating point organised by state emergency services during power cut in Kyiv on 24 November. Photograph: Oleg Petrasyuk/EPA*

The onset of winter is a good time to revamp the response to Russia's continuing invasion, with a combination of generous government aid and direct support from public and private aid providers.

Western cities and institutions can support their Ukrainian counterparts. It is also a good time to combat the fatigue in private donations and put aside political bickering over international aid that could lead to assistance arriving too late. As Russia tries to use civilian suffering to turn the tide of a losing war, mitigating that suffering should be Ukraine's partners' priority.

Simon Schlegel is Ukraine analyst for the International Crisis Group

Zero-Covid protests are spreading across China – but a violent crackdown will follow

James McMurray

China's heavy-handed zero-Covid policy was intended to save lives. Now, it's having devastating consequences. Last week, a fire killed at least 10 people, including children, in a tower block in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. As ever in China, official numbers are unreliable, and the true number of casualties may be much higher. It's clear that the citizens now protesting across China blame the tragedy on the lockdown, despite the claims of local officials that fire escapes in the building were not locked. Horrific videos of the fire show emergency services attempting in vain to douse the flames from beyond a roadblock, while victims scream from the windows pleading for somebody to open the doors of their apartments.

For once, the suffering of Xinjiang's people seems to have evoked widespread empathy among China's wider populace. When Uyghur demonstrations in Urumqi were crushed by police and security services in 2009, it evoked little sympathy from China's ethnic Han majority. Instead, the demonstrations precipitated a wave of ethnic violence, accompanied by calls across the Chinese internet for severe punishment for the demonstrators. Similarly, the intense crackdown on Uyghur society that has been going on since 2017 – involving mass incarcerations, forced sterilisations and the destruction of communities – was largely dismissed by the rest of the Chinese populace as a necessary measure to control a defiant and restive minority.

▲ *Protests in Beijing, 28 November 2022. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images*

Now, however, zealous agents of the state have rigorously enforced lockdowns across the country that have lasted months at a time. Often, as shown in innumerable videos shared online over the past three years, they have done so by chaining or barring the doors, fire escapes and gates of apartment buildings. Reports of difficulty getting medical supplies and food to families locked in their homes have been common.

Despite the extent of the restrictions across China, it was perhaps inevitable that when this tragedy came about, it would be in a Uyghur neighbourhood in Xinjiang. Lockdowns there have been particularly severe, and seem to have been targeted at minority communities. They have been widely regarded as an extension of the security lockdowns that were already a familiar feature of the region, and locals have reported that the two would sometimes blur together: people told they were being taken to centralised quarantine facilities after being alerted to a close contact with a Covid carrier have said they were instead delivered to re-education camps. The quarantine facilities themselves are no better than the camps; at the former, inmates have told of being regularly hosed down with

Continued *on page 19*

Continued *from page 17*

disinfectant, and forced to swallow unknown medications.

The protests are a particularly difficult problem for the Chinese state. To see protests in Urumqi at all is shocking, given the intense security control of the region and the severe consequences of previous demonstrations. But, more than this, it is remarkable that the protests in Xinjiang comprise largely Han demonstrators. While the state has long seen minorities in Xinjiang as a problem, the region's Han population – most of whom were moved in from inner China during the 20th century – has historically been regarded as part of the solution, tying the region more closely to the rest of the country and diluting the local Uyghur majority. This has given them comparative licence to complain, and now to protest, while many Uyghurs are understandably too terrified to leave their homes.

But the special treatment of the Han in Xinjiang is unlikely to protect them for long. The demonstrations in Urumqi are a part of a bigger movement that is troubling the streets of major cities including Shanghai and Wuhan. The state will not tolerate such dissent. Some regional protests have occasionally been successful at overturning local policies or drawing attention to corrupt officials, but zero Covid is Xi Jinping's flagship policy in his effort to eradicate the virus from China. Any climbdown will pose a threat to his authority. The inevitable increase in cases that would follow from abandoning the policy would also undermine the state's image as the efficient, guiding hand of the Chinese people.

There is no predicting how this will end, but the likelihood of a violent state response is high. Such a response, however, runs the risk of provoking further calls for democracy and equality that have begun to pepper the anti-lockdown protests. Just as people across China have experienced their own lockdowns and can sympathise with the Uyghur families who burned to death in their homes, they may come to further sympathise with the desire to be free of the Communist party's iron grip.

Dr James McMurray is a research associate in anthropology and a member of the Asia Centre at the University of Sussex

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

China's Covid crisis demands terrible choices. The world will suffer if this goes wrong

Devi Sridhar

Protesters across China have made one thing very clear: after three years of harsh restrictions, many people are tired of their government's pursuit of an increasingly ineffective zero-Covid strategy. China once celebrated its success in containing outbreaks and keeping its economy running, but it has been slow to adapt to a world of more infective variants and mass vaccination. As life begins to feel increasingly normal in Britain and elsewhere, 49 cities – representing a third of China's population and two-fifths of its economic output – are in partial or total lockdown.

The protests will put pressure on the regime to change its approach, but that may be easier said than done. China has been highly politically committed to its Covid policy, even as it has become less and less tenable. And the situation with its health system, population immunity and vaccine stocks is vastly different from ours, partly because of the choices it made earlier in the pandemic. China will have to face some form of living with Covid soon, and millions of lives – not to mention global economic stability – depend on how this happens.

China was an early adopter of overwhelming measures to contain Covid. This involved recurrent lockdowns affecting millions, but also building isolation centres and hospitals very quickly, mass PCR testing, intensive contact tracing and surveillance, and mandatory masking. Some of the measures were incredibly draconian. Yet, despite the cost to civil liberties, it worked in stopping Covid-19 initially.

But then in 2021, several safe and effective vaccines were approved, which meant that widespread protection could be delivered to western populations. Take-up was remarkably high, and country after country, including maximum suppression countries such as New Zealand, Australia and South Korea, pivoted from containment to mass vaccination, access to antiviral therapies and "living with Covid-19".

▲ *'While there are increasing protests against restrictions, other parts of the country are calling for authorities to do everything to protect them from Covid.' Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images*

China, though, stayed with its strategy of elimination within its borders. The Chinese government did roll out its homegrown vaccine but took a different approach than the west. Its vaccination priority list focused on healthy young adults, and instead noted the side-effects of the vaccine to elderly groups. It didn't promote the vaccine to elderly groups until November 2021, but by this time considerable vaccine scepticism had built up. Rising concerns about the low effectiveness of the non-mRNA Chinese vaccines were also a concern: studies indicated that protection faded fast and was undetectable after six months.

Recent reports suggest that only about 40% of over-80s have received a booster shot, and millions still remain unvaccinated. To put this in perspective, the overall booster rate was more than 90% in Japan while only 68% in China. And the Chinese government's efforts to push vaccination have been met by a population used to zero-Covid messaging and having a false sense of security that they won't ever be exposed to the virus, so why get vaccinated at all?

And population exposure has been minimal in China. It has had just under 1.5m infections in a population of 1.4 billion, and the national death toll is 5229. Compare this with England where the Financial Times estimates that more than 90% of the population has had Covid at least once. This hybrid "wall of immunity" in Britain has come at a major cost: the UK death rate stands at 2,400 per million, compared with just three deaths in a million in China.

All of this means that China's population has a lower vaccination rate, with vaccines that appear less effective, than in most other countries. And many people don't have any immunity gained from a previous infection either. If China gives up on containment and allows a large wave of infections, the country will take a huge loss of life given current vaccination levels: they are just too low in the most at-risk groups. This would overwhelm the already fragile Chinese healthcare system with too many patients who need care.

And the 2020 playbook isn't working in 2022 in China, with a much more infectious version of the virus – Omicron – and a population fed up and tired of restrictions and constantly changing rules. Millions of businesses have had to shut down and the country has taken a major economic hit: the World Bank forecasts GDP growth in China of just 2.8%, behind the rest of the region's average of 5.3%. This is the first time China's GDP growth is less than its neighbours since 1990. Yet there are few signs the government will change tack for political and health system reasons.

Politically, the president, Xi Jinping, has projected a clear narrative of protecting China's population through a zero-Covid policy and sees it as one of his successes. He defended the strategy vigorously at the recent Communist party congress, and any sudden policy shift may be seen as an admission of failure. And while there are increasing protests against restrictions, other parts of the country are calling for authorities to do everything to protect them from Covid. They've heard about the death toll in the western world and don't want to be exposed to the virus.

The other concern of Chinese scientists and politicians is long Covid, which some feel has been underestimated in western countries. And you can understand this concern. An estimated 2 million people are suffering from long Covid in Britain and it is cited as one of the major reasons for the rising number of "economically inactive" people.

No matter what approach China takes, it needs to improve its vaccines. But to do this it will need access to mRNA technology, and this has been stuck at an impasse. Moderna has refused to transfer its technology to Chinese firms for manufacturing, instead eager to sell directly to a large market. China has instead worked to develop a homegrown mRNA vaccine but this has caused delays in rollout.

The countries that dealt most successfully with the pandemic, such as New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Denmark and others, did it by successfully moving from containment in 2020 to mass vaccination and treatments in 2021 and 2022. This is the only sustainable exit from this pandemic and we're likely to see China take this route eventually. It will need to get mRNA vaccines to the biggest priority groups quickly, and also bring an exhausted public along through what is likely to be a jarring shift in strategy – from no Covid at all, to Covid circulation with vaccine protection.

Let's hope China makes this transition before it is forced, regardless of what the governments wants, to live with Covid before it is ready. China buckling under a wave of Covid would affect the entire world, not just disrupting economic stability but potentially creating new variants that could set progress back everywhere.

Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh

We report to no one. We report for everyone.
Support The Guardian at gu.com/support
The Guardian

My US hellscape or broken Britain: where would you rather seek healthcare?

Emma Brockes

For the second time since moving to the US 15 years ago, I had to call 911 this week. The first time, six years ago, was when smoke poured into the elevator from a fire in the laundry room and four fire trucks arrived within minutes. This week, it was to request an ambulance for a sick neighbour. Between dialling the number, and a gurney and two paramedics materialising in our hallway, was approximately seven minutes. I found myself thinking something I used to think about the NHS: what an amazing service.

An ambulance in Washington Heights, New York, 2020. Photograph: Bryan Smith/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

My understanding, at this distance, is that most ambulances in the UK do not show up in under 10 minutes, even when the emergency is dire. A friend who had a heart attack in the street in London this year was, he told me, lying on the pavement for 40 minutes before the ambulance showed up. This is terrifying, and yet still marginally less terrifying than the common American experience of emergency care, in which gratitude for efficiency is undercut by the dim but thrilling possibility of losing one's house when the invoice arrives.

All of which is at the forefront of my mind as we slog through the season of healthcare renewal. I have to stop going on about this, I know. Short of moving to Canada, or joining a powerful union I don't qualify for, there is nothing to be done about it. Still, the sheer punitive opacity of the system has never shocked me so much as it is currently doing, when, after years of renewing an existing policy, I finally decide to go shopping.

"Do you know how this works?" says a sales agent. I have just asked if she can send me a breakdown of coverage and exclusions for a policy that costs in the region of $10,000 a year. "How it works is we can send you the full policy details after you've signed and paid, and then if you want to cancel, you have 30 days."

There is a pause while I digest this. "Isn't that … quite weird?" I say. She laughs nervously.

"I mean … it's just how it works." Brightening, she says, "But you can ask any question about the policy and I'll answer it!"

After calling three other agents expecting a different response, I understand that no one here is acting in bad faith; this is, as she says, just how it is: an Alice in Wonderland system in which you only know what you're buying after you've bought it. And so we grind through the preliminaries. No pre-existing conditions; nobody smokes; no interest in maternity cover. All of which cheers the agent no end, as it results in a relatively attractive quote.

I ask the single question it is vital to ask in New York when buying health insurance for your family. "If someone gets cancer, can we get into Sloan Kettering?"

Her voice sharpens instantly. "*Does* someone have cancer?"

"No. No one has cancer."

"Well, then, yes. It's a PPO (preferred provider organisation), it'll be accepted everywhere."

But of course, this isn't the whole story, and when I ask why the provider she's flogging isn't listed on my doctor's table of accepted insurance, she gets tetchy. "We're accepted by 80% of medical providers in the US." Ah. You can guarantee, in this scenario, that the 20% of doctors who don't accept this sketchy insurance are in New York, where you can't cough without someone sending you a bill for $350 (£290).

In the middle of all this, I visit my wonderful primary care doctor for my annual medical. She commiserates with me and tries to find a workaround to foil my existing insurers. In the US, public health policy recommends routine colonoscopies for everyone over 45 – ha, you wouldn't get that in Britain, I thought, when she told me about it last year, before checking my policy to find it wasn't covered. A colonoscopy costs upwards of $5,000 (£4,130) in New York. "They just want you to die," says my doctor lugubriously, a starker statement than I was expecting. But I guess at some level, true.

So there you have it. Broken Britain or this hellscape? It's a tough call. Today, I will get on the phone again to try to find a loophole in the system, a unicorn policy that covers both routine screenings and major medical events; one that, in the event of an emergency, will bring an ambulance to my door inside of 10 minutes – assuming I'm not too terrified to call for it.

Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist

A free Spotify alternative? How US libraries became the place to stream your new favorite band

Alaina Demopoulos

"There are countless people who come in and say, 'We just moved and this is our first stop,'" says Anna M Zook, reference and digital services librarian at the LE Phillips Memorial Public Library in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

"I always emphasize the fact that we have this local music platform that immediately wires them into the scene."

The Seattle Public Library is among those offering a Spotify alternative. Photograph: Jason Redmond/Reuters

Zook's talking about Sawdust City Sounds, a free streaming platform run by the library. It features over 50 artists from the greater Eau Claire area – folk singers, rock bands, DJs and a few rappers – who applied to be in the collection, which is curated by a group of librarians and local musicians.

The endeavor is part college radio, part Spotify alternative. As Vice recently reported, over a dozen libraries across the US and Canada have called on the startup Rabble to help set up their local music streaming platforms.

Libraries in cities known for their music scenes, such as Nashville, Austin, Seattle, Portland and New Orleans, have all set up their own versions. But towns that are perhaps less idealized as musical havens have also taken part, including Fort Worth, Texas; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Davenport, Iowa.

"People understand the public library to be theirs," said Preston Austin, who co-founded Rabble with the musicologist Kelly Hiser. "That creates a unique place for participation where an artist who makes a contribution [to the platform] knows they are contributing to their community."

Rabble is becoming better known, as Spotify, which gives artists as little as $0.0033 per stream, has been the subject of much criticism for its payment model. The Union of Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW) and the US congresswoman Rashida Tlaib have called on Congress to create a royalty system for streaming platforms. (A representative for UMAW declined to comment for this story.)

Payment for artists listed with libraries using Rabble's software started at a one-time $200 honorarium, but it has since been raised to $250. Austin expects the rate will keep climbing.

While $250 may be a relatively small fee, it may matter a lot symbolically for smaller artists. "It appears that for many, possibly most, of our artists, $200 is actually the largest royalty check they'll ever get for their work," Austin said.

Zook and her team of curators – local artists who include a folk singer, jazz musicians, a punk rocker and a library staffer who has played drums in rock bands – get together to review the open submissions. So far, they have received about 31 entries. They have the budget to accept between 20 and 25 acts.

"We want to make sure that we have this balance of genres and voices represented in our curation process so that we can shed a light on all the different types of music that make up the sound of the Chippewa Valley," Zook said. "We want listeners to get an insight into the town and what's important to our culture."

Leti Garza. Photograph: Brenda Ladd

Leti Garza submitted her bilingual political folk album Borderland to

Continued on page 21

Continued from page 20

Austin Public Library's streaming service last year. "I feel like [the curators] chose a variety of different genres, cultures and races, and I'm very happy to note that," she said.

Treble NLS, a Pittsburgh-based rapper who contributed his album Reine: Story of an American Reject to the Carnegie Library's Stacks project in 2019, said he had submitted his music in an attempt to give it the broadest possible reach. "I'm a contemplative rapper," he said. "I want my music to connect with people from all walks of life. Everything I do arts-wise elevates the local scene."

Noelle Hampton has lived and performed in Austin for nearly 20 years, but she said she still discovers new music through Austin Public Library's streaming service, which streams her band the Belle Sounds. "When I have taken the time to go through the site, I am blown away by how much great music is there," she said. "I was scrolling through all of the artists and was surprised by how many bands there that I still didn't know of. This is a great tool for local discovery."

Austin says that introduction to local artists is common among local libraries using streaming services. "It turns out that people who think they know their city's music scene do not," he said. "Even in relatively small cities, every single person who is highly connected to the local scene who we worked with directly discovered acts they did not know."

That sense of discovery can feel increasingly hard to replicate in an era when streaming has replaced crate-digging. Spotify's algorithm has the ability to spit out an endless amount of music, which provides what Austin calls a "lean-back experience". It's nice for moments when people want to zone out, but it doesn't make them feel connected to specific artists. They may not even know who they're listening to as the music drones on.

"You make a selection and music continues to come out, and you can lean back and soak it in," Austin said. "You're not really engaging with that music scene, and your choices are being made for you by an algorithm."

Music lovers have to be a bit more attentive using libraries' streaming services, perusing album art and artist bios to see what looks appealing. While the artists they find may not be getting paid traditional royalties, Austin and Zook say that many listeners will end up paying the artists they discover directly in other ways, such as buying their merch or attending their shows.

Garza, who has been performing in the Austin art scene since the 70s, thinks this is a good start. "The world has a long way to go on understanding the role of artists in the world and how they should be fairly compensated, but I do appreciate [this service]," she said. "One step at a time."

Breaking the silence: movies grapple with the #MeToo movement

Adrian Horton

The beginning of the #MeToo movement, as a cultural reckoning on endemic sexual misconduct and abuse, can be roughly dated by the click of a mouse. On 5 October 2017, the New York Times published an investigation into the film producer Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood titan with a decades-long history of systemic abuse, triggering an outpouring of recrimination and recognition on and offline. (The phrase #MeToo was coined over a decade earlier by activist Tarana Burke, as a way for Black women to share their stories of sexual violence.)

That first moment – reporters and editors hovering around a computer screen, cursor lingering on the "publish" button – is the narrative climax of She Said, a new film adaptation of reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey's book on the Weinstein investigation. Five years after the start of the movement, She Said is the most overt of so-called "#MeToo movies" – films which depict revelations of sexual abuse, process the upheaval of powerful perpetrators, grapple with the consequences, or envision a path forward. The film, directed by Unorthodox's Maria Schrader, is literally the story behind the story that kicked everything off, the Hollywood version of the mission to uncover what had been an open secret in Hollywood for years.

But it is one of several this year clearly inflected by the movement. Todd Field's cerebral, challenging Tár, starring Cate Blanchett as a chillingly vaunted maestro, undoes its blinkered protagonist via the public exposure of her inappropriate relationships with female protégés. Women Talking, director Sarah Polley's adaptation of Miriam Toews's 2018 novel, embeds in aftermath. Following a spate of vicious attacks by men armed with the livestock version of Rohypnol, women representing three prominent families in an insular Mennonite community in Bolivia congregate in a hayloft to discuss their options: do nothing, fight back, or leave. (The film and novel are based on a real spate of rapes by at least eight men, of at least 150 women and girls, from 2005 to 2009.)

Jessie Buckley in Women Talking Photograph: Michael Gibson

Taken together, all three films (which either have or will be released this fall/winter) mark a watershed season for #MeToo — as an anniversary, as reflections with small yet still notable critical distance, and as representations for the range of cinematic responses to the movement. Notably, all three skirt around depictions of violence, relying on suggestion, visual cues, dialogue and assumed familiarity with media coverage to impart the details of trauma. (This is perhaps a response to the brutal depictions of violence that became de rigueur on prestige television in the 2010s, most controversially on Game of Thrones; the fifth season rape of Sansa Stark by Ramsey Bolton, used for shock and as motivation for witness Theon Greyjoy, was a series low point.)

Sexual assault, in all three films, is negative space. Each one effectively deploys, as Slate's Dana Stevens argues, ellipsis and absence in its portrait of trauma and complicity – in Women Talking, the depictions of the attacks (we instead see the morning after: bruises, blood, confusion, screams) and, save one brief glimpse of a man running away, its perpetrators. In She Said, the crimes and the bearish presence of Weinstein. In Tár, the perspective of the victim, a former student whom we glimpse only in the brush of Lydia's attention.

This is in line with how other films have handled #MeToo since the cascade of revelations in 2017. We do not see assault, or aftermath, or even the big bad boss in The Assistant, Kitty Green's unsettling 2020 portrait of corrosive adjacency. Instead, during a day in the life of a low-level assistant at a Weinstein-esque production company, clues point to something sinister and vile festering at work. A syringe in the boss's trash can, a meeting with a pretty young actor moved to a hotel room, a futile meeting with HR – we, the audience likely familiar with Weinstein coverage, can sense the fuller picture. Emerald Fennell's Promising Young Woman is completely opposite in tone – pastel-colored, darkly comic, a jawbreaker with a poisonous core – but similarly privileges the caustic effects of sexual assault on a witness over depicting the act itself.

The 2019 film Bombshell, Jay Roach's star-studded account of the 2016 dethroning of Roger Ailes at Fox News by three anchors he abused/mentored (and which arguably laid the groundwork for the Weinstein investigation to not land on deaf ears), does include a gut-wrenching casting couch scene between Ailes and a fictional young anchor, played by Margot Robbie. But the film generally adheres to the expectation, since 2017, that #MeToo movies should act as a corrective by centering women's perspectives. (Unfortunately for Bombshell, those women were Fox News anchors with contemptible politics for whom the film pulled its hardest punches.) HBO's underrated 2018 film The Tale, which does include scenes of sexual grooming of a young girl, takes that perspective and spirals; it aims for and achieves the psychological realism of coming to terms with traumatic memory.

Television, as a medium with a quicker turnaround time and more flexible structure, has served more as a messy interlocutor, a loose reflection. See: The Morning Show's fittingly indelicate first-season plot line modeled on the removal of Matt Lauer from the Today Show after an internal report of rape; I gave it points at the time for trying, even if the dialogue had the subtlety and nuance of a car crash. See also: the MeToo-themed Grey's Anatomy episode, or the sprawling 2019 Showtime series The Loudest Voice, also about Ailes. As an expression of processing sexual assault while living a life, nothing holds a candle to I May Destroy You, Michaela' Coel's 2020 tour de force.

All of this is to say: She Said, Tár and Women Talking are in a vigorous conversation. Of the three, She Said is the most straightforward, a clear-cut journalism drama. It's better than it should be – it avoids the distraction of celebrity impersonation, and smartly cedes the floor to Weinstein's non-famous victims, schooled in the art of piecing their lives back together. It's resonant recent history, but likely still too soon; the film made just $2.25m on its opening weekend, one of the worst debuts for a major studio film opening in over 2,000 theaters.

Tár is the best film overall, a provocative and mesmeric arrangement of what should be third-rail topics – #MeToo in which the perpetrator is a self-described "uHaul lesbian", the bugbear of "cancel culture," digital realism with social media screenshots. Tár's bucking of expectation – it embeds, relentlessly and transgressively, with the perpetrator, her narcissism guiding our sensory intake – is one of its greatest strengths. You do not need to know the details of Lydia Tár's sins to understand their severity, their monstrosity. You do have to know she was staggeringly talented and that those things may be irreconcilable. Tár is, among many things, a successful portrait of the refrain "two things can be true at once," a story that resists easy moralizing and clean lines without ever equivocating on her behavior; a reminder that none of this is easy.

Zoe Kazan and Carey Mulligan in She Said Photograph: JoJo Whilden/AP

But it is Women Talking that offers the most promising path forward, the only one that tries to answer the thorny questions raised by the movement. Women Talking is more effective conceptually than it is visually – the desaturated color palette corresponds to the leaching of faith in one's community but ultimately makes it feel more distant than it already is. Some of the monologues feel more apt for a stage. But its premise – women *talking*as action unto itself –feels bracingly radical.

I wondered, during the 2021 awards buzz for Promising Young Woman, what a #MeToo film that burned past rage could look like, what a story that looked beyond trauma to healing, complication, growth, continuance could be. It would look like Polley's film, in which almost entirely female characters (save a literate male schoolteacher and a trans man also targeted by the attackers) discuss their options and brainstorm justice. What comes after, in a world where this exists, among all the other things? What other worlds could we realize? What would healing look like? What would justice be? Those are questions I hope the next era of #MeToo films embrace.

The world needs independent journalism, now more than ever
Support The Guardian at gu.com/support
The Guardian

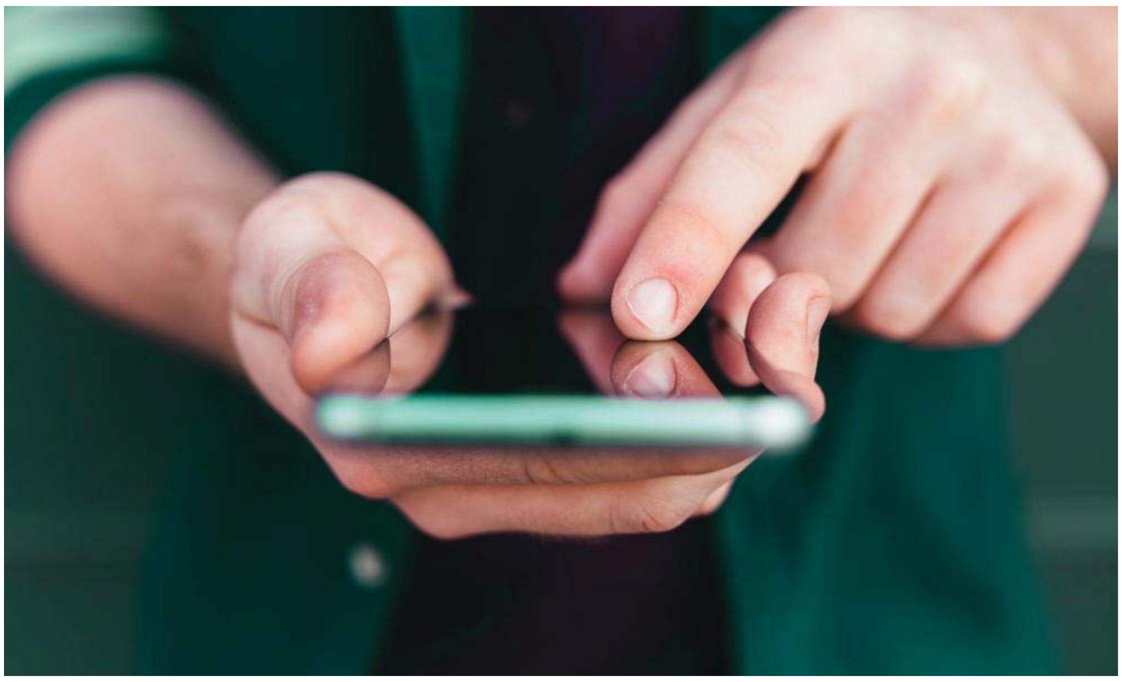
Long Covid: the patient who's made an app to track symptoms

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

When Harry Leeming developed symptoms of long Covid, he found the lack of understanding of the condition alarming. "They became so severe that I went to A&E and I was turned away, being told that I had anxiety or that it was deconditioning," he said. "It's been very frustrating to not be taken seriously as a patient."

Now, he's hoping to help those living with the condition by creating tools to track symptoms and manage activity.

The app, Visible, is currently available in beta form, and is also geared towards people living with conditions such as Myalgic encephalomyelitis, also called chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS).



▲ Visible is building the ability to measure conditions using digital biomarkers so that patients can manage their own condition, Leeming says. Photograph: Westend61/Getty Images

Leeming, co-founder and CEO of Visible, said the goal is to help those with these conditions manage their illness – such as the worsening of symptoms after exertion.

"It doesn't happen immediately after you have exerted yourself. It actually happens hours or even days later when your symptoms get worse. So because that feedback loop is so long, it's very difficult to tell if you're overdoing it," he said.

"What we do is we shorten that feedback loop so we tell you much sooner when you need to slow down and when you're over-exerting to reduce the chance of having a symptom crash."

Leeming hopes the app will also help to shine light on "invisible" illnesses.

"I think the biggest issue with long Covid and these diseases like chronic fatigue syndrome is the lack of a diagnostic test – and in the eyes of the medical world, if your tests all come back normal and then you're seen as a psychosomatic," he said.

"Really what we're doing with Visible is we're building the ability to measure these conditions [using] digital biomarkers that will help make these conditions visible – visible to patients so that they can manage their own condition, visible to clinicians, so they can recognise them, and visible to research as well so they can understand them."

In its current, free, form, Visible is somewhat basic, offering users a morning and evening check-in where symptoms, sleep quality and menstrual cycle can be logged, while the biometrics of heart rate and heart rate variability (HRV) can be measured by placing a finger on the back of the smartphone's camera lens.

"Research has shown that HRV is reduced in people living with long Covid and ME/CFS, and that it can be a reliable predictor of fatigue severity," the app notes.

After a few days the app starts to offer a "pace score" to help guide exertion levels, while users can also explore trends in their symptoms.

"We overlay them essentially on graphs next to the biometric. So you can spot patterns in your illness and then make changes to your lifestyle," said Leeming.

Leeming, who was an avid cyclist and climber before developing long Covid, added that early next year the team are planning to roll out a subscription service involving wearable devices to track further metrics. But unlike fitness apps, which encourage users to do more, Visible will help people pace their activity.

"In the future we do want to move to predicting symptom flare up so that we can tell people earlier and give them a larger envelope in which to exert themselves," he said.

The team, who have gained $1m (£847,000) of funding from healthcare funds and investors, have been working with researchers and medical professionals to produce the app, and are hoping to share anonymous data with scientists to fuel new insights into invisible conditions.

Dr Viki Male of Imperial College London is currently in the process of gaining ethical approval and funding to use data from app users, as well as a control group, to study potential relationships between long Covid symptoms and different stages of the menstrual cycle.

"It can be very important for people who've got long Covid because if we know that hormones affect your symptoms, that straight away gives us the possibility of using things like hormonal contraception to maybe make them less bad," she said.

Leeming suggested the app may also bring other benefits to users.

"Having objective measurements of your condition gives you a lot of validation as to how you're feeling … and also feeling more in control of your illness," he said. "You have so many questions about your body, and we help to answer those."

Claire Higham, of the charity Long Covid Support who herself has the condition, welcomed the app, saying while energy management is crucial for those with long Covid, many have wrongly been told to exercise.

"An app that can guide and make visible this problem for patients, family, doctors and society is a step forward," she said.

Founder of first Black-owned US outdoor gear shop: 'We're more than the narratives out there'

Joe Kanzangu

Jahmicah Dawes stood out during his undergraduate days at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, a small city known for its glut of pro rodeo cowboys and cowgirls.

Dawes was no rodeo rider. The only Black person in town, he refashioned his dorm room into something of a stylist's atelier, and would dress his fellow students in spiffy sneakers and vintage clothing before their date nights.

A decade on, Dawes still calls Stephenville home, and he is still outfitting its residents, as the founder and owner of Slim Pickins Outfitters, an outdoor gear shop. Located in a former pharmacy that he and his wife, Heather, converted, Slim Pickins carries everything from standard-fare fleeces to T-shirts made in conjunction with Black

▲ Jahmicah Dawes, right, his wife, Heather, and their children inside Slim Pickins Outfitters. Photograph: Tommy Corey

Outside, Inc, a San Antonio, Texas-based nonprofit that connects Black youths to nature programs.

An avid hiker, Dawes says his retail shop is all about culture, community and connecting to the natural land. Slim Pickins Outfitters also happens to be the first Black-owned outdoor gear shop in the country. In an industry that boasts $127bn in annual revenue and 4,749 shops, only three retail destinations are Black-owned. Add in racial discrimination and resource inequity launching and maintaining a Black-owned business, as Dawes has been doing since 2017, can be a steep uphill battle.

Yet one wouldn't necessarily know that from walking into his shop. Presided over by the family dog, Bill Murray, the wood-walled retail space is an oasis of adventure and joy. The displayed goods are a carefully chosen collection of gear, from both big name labels and Slim Pickins' partnership with Public Lands, the outdoor gear line owned by Dick's Sporting Goods that advocates greater accessibility to the outdoor life for more people. The space in the back of the shop is a community room where visitors can practice yoga or take hunting certification classes.

▲ The Dawes family outside Slim Pickins Outfitters. Photograph: Kristen Fondon Photography

Continued on page 23

Continued from page 22

While Dawes' shop is very much an independent concern – one that temporarily had to close during the pandemic – he pushes back on the term "small business". "The effort, the time, the investments, the craft," he says. "The commitment is never small."

What did your early introduction to the outdoors look like?

My dad is from Jamaica, and although my sister and I go to summer camps, we would spend a couple weeks to a month with my grandparents in Florida. They migrated from Jamaica when my dad was young. That's where I learned where to raise hogs, slaughter goats and other skills you couldn't pick up at your typical summer camp. By the time I was in high school, I had joined Future Farmers of America, and in college I took classes in biology and anatomy. I decided to go to Tarleton State University, a predominately white institution, instead of Howard University because I wanted to have an exposure to equine culture and sciences. Yet I always connected to the outdoors.

I've always kind of stuck out due to that. In my area, you can find me doing things that Black people aren't necessarily depicted doing on the regular. We're more than the narratives that are out there. In the same light that there are different kinds of soul food depending on the regional culture you come from, we're a multitude of different expressions.

My parents weren't the type to say "you can do anything"; they just never told me I couldn't. When I got to Stephenville, the things that I was into [evolved], and that got me into clothing construction and fashion merchandising. I find joy in doing all of this. I love skating in bright colors, fixing bikes, wearing vintage clothes and styling the people around me. The passion just continued to grow from that. It's always been cool to be able to outfit others and build a relationship through that experience. The intimacy of brick-and-mortar retail allows me to have authentic interactions with people and their families.

Being an independent Black-owned business owner, have you felt supported by your community?

I don't want to get it twisted. I don't want to romanticize the business aspect of things. The support is there but it needs to be more. Locally, the support has been there from individuals, but I haven't felt collectively supported by the institutions here in Stephenville. Honestly, it hurts and bothers me. I'm being told by the broader outdoor industry that what I'm doing is important, impactful, and I should keep it up, but I don't see that echoed by local community entities. We have those individuals that do support us, but it's tough day to day. The national encouragement does feed our soul so that we can impact and connect to the local community. Being a believer, the source of my joy comes from the people that come into the shop no matter what our financial circumstance may be.

How do you want to impact the outdoor industry?

My approach is like a mosaic. I didn't come from the established outdoor industry perspective. I grew up loving sneakers, fashion and vintage apparel. Slim Pickins is different. I want to encourage other people to be OK with being different. The outdoor industry needs more people who have not been sired or influenced by the elites of the outdoor industry.

How do you see Slim Pickins moving forward?

We are a historically underutilized business [HUB] vendor, and one of the benefits is that certain allocated dollars from state and federal entities are to be used at HUB-certified companies. I have yet to see increased sales from universities or governmental entities. I'm willing to work with these institutions, but the effort also has to be made on their part. We're also open to curated gift orders from companies. We welcome national and regional entities ordering from us for their teams. Especially with the holiday season coming up, we want to work with sports teams and different syndicates. This not only helps us out, but it also sets a corporate precedent on investing and reinvesting in brick-and-mortar spaces so they can continue to be there for their communities. When you support us, you're supporting other independent businesses around Texas as well.

Rachel Roddy's recipe for Sicilian quince paste

Rachel Roddy

It was my partner Vincenzo's great aunt who made cotognata. The youngest of five siblings, all of whom had their own families, it was both her speciality and responsibility. Every autumn, in her kitchen in Gela on the south coast of Sicily, she cooked kilos and kilos of mela cotogna(quince) down to a puree and passed it though a hand-cranked food mill, before bringing it back to a boil with lemon juice and sugar. Once the mixture reached the setting point (a dense, molten state that burped and spat at passing children), it was poured into terracotta or tin moulds and left to set to a firm jelly. Every mould was patterned inside, so, when turned out, the forms had a raised decoration, possibly recognisable as flowers, grapes, swirls or an angel.

Some were dusted with sugar, others not; either way, they were left to dry for a few more days. How cotognata is dried is personal, an everlasting competition the cook has with herself: colour, consistency, how firm, how dry … Some people swear by a sunny table outside, while a cool oven is also an option; Vincenzo's great aunt used every spare surface in the house for hers.

The quince is an ancient fruit. Part of the rose family, it's the only member of the genus *Cydonia,* and native to Iran, Turkey, possibly Greece and the Crimean peninsula. Its tree is small and shrubby, not fussy about where it grows (it loves a ravine), and has many thorny branches. In spring, pale pink and white flowers with ruffled edges are the start of the autumn's fruit. In Sicily, there are two varieties: the somewhat pear-shaped oblonga and the apple-like vulgaris, both of which are green to begin with, before ripening into a warm, yellow fruit with a fuzzy coat. The smell is warm, too – somewhere between a ripe apple and a pear, with spiced musk. In a 980AD poem, Shafer Ben Utman al-Mushafi suggests quince's perfume is that of a loved woman, while it has the colour of an impassioned and scrawny lover.

Sweet Sicily: Rachel Roddy's cotognata, or Sicilian quince paste. Photograph: Amy Currell/The Guardian. Set design: Jess Morgan. Food stylist: Laurie Perry. Photo assistant: Alex Bibby.

Sugarcane arrived in Sicily with the Arabs in the 900s. In her book about Sicilian food, Mary Taylor Simeti explains that with cane arrived a talent and love for comfits – sugar-coated spices for the chamber. Together with almond paste and candied fruit (quince, pumpkin, citrus), quince comfits established Sicily as a producer of confections, which sweetened courts all over Europe. Production diminished following the extinction of the Arab and Norman dynasties, but the traditions remained, in courts and among ordinary people. After all, quinces grew wild all over the island, and honey or grape must have provided an alternative to sugar.

Quince's firm and astringent flesh is rarely eaten raw in Italy, but well-suited to preserving, and, together with the skin, has enough pectin to ensure a firm set. As already mentioned, the exact set depends on the maker. I like mine firm but with wobble, somewhere between a thick jam and a wine gum.

Like its Spanish first cousin *membrillo*, if cotognata is wrapped when stored, it remains softer for longer. Exposed to the air, it hardens. Vincenzo knows this better than me, remembering the portions of his great aunt's prolific preservation efforts that were given to his grandma. Taken from the cupboard in the living room, an oval in November was still soft and pliable, while by April they were firmer, more like fruit pastilles; by August, they were starting to turn opaque. The quantity was such that certain batches of cotognatamight last long enough to meet the next batch, or the next, when they were more like crystals. This is the cotognata that Vincenzo remembers. An oval pushed in his pocket on the way to school, hard but sticky, so collecting whatever was inside – fuzz and fluff, a Sicilian version of my pear drop, or the half-sucked cola bottle that thrilled when found.

While cotognata is by no means just a Christmas thing, the taste, scent, deep colour and the fact that quince is in season do make it feel particularly appropriate at this time of year. It is delicious with cheese and cold meats, or with seed cake. Or given as a gift to be eaten (or stored in the cupboard).

Cotognata, or Sicilian quince paste

Like very thick jam crossed with jelly cubes, cotognata is similar to membrillo, but slightly cloudy. Like membrillo, it sets into a firm paste that

Continued on page 24

Continued *from page 23*

can be cut into cubes or slices. Be careful when cooking, because the pulp gets really hot and can spit.

Prep 5 minCook 1 hr 20 min+Set 8 hr +Makes 1 x 40cm x 30cm baking tray or 8 saucers Keep Months

1½kg quinceJuice of 2 lemons800g-1.2kg sugar – the amount will depend on the weight of the quince after sieving

Wipe the quince with a damp cloth to rub off any fuzz, but don't peel them. Quarter, cut away and discard the cores, then cut the flesh into large chunks. Put these in a heavy-based pan with the lemon juice and 200ml water, then cook over a medium heat, stirring often, for about 40 minutes, until the fruit is very soft.

Pass the quince mixture through a food mill until you have a fine pulp. Weigh the pulp and return it to the pan with 800g sugar for every kilo of pulp. Heat gently, stirring to dissolve the sugar, then turn up the heat and cook, stirring regularly, for 25-40 minutes, until the paste is thick: when you run a wooden spoon across the base of the pan, it should leave a gap.

Spoon into a baking tray lined with greaseproof paper, or into eight moulds or saucers, then leave uncovered in a cool, dry place for at least eight hours until set completely (I give mine 12 hours). Wrap in greaseproof paper and store in a cool, dry place, where it will keep for months.

Covid's still a big issue for China – and that's trouble for global economy

Richard Partington Economics correspondent

▲ *An epidemic control worker walks past closed shops in Beijing on Sunday. Photograph: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images*

For much of the world there has been hope for some time that the worst economic shocks from the Covid pandemic are in the rearview mirror. In China, however, there are important reminders that risks to the world economy still remain.

Three years since the virus first spread, protests in several Chinese cities against the Beijing government's strict zero-Covid policies have reignited concerns in financial markets over the economic costs of the pandemic. Global oil prices have fallen back, while the Chinese yuan and stock markets across Asia have taken a hammering.

Daily new Covid cases have continued to rise, exceeding peaks seen during strict lockdowns in Shanghai earlier this year. With the ongoing use of tough controls to contain outbreaks, patience among China's population of 1.4 billion appears to be being severely tested. Even though Beijing announced "20 measures" earlier this month to ease its zero-Covid approach, it hasn't gone smoothly.

The crucial unknown is how long protests might continue and how Beijing will respond. What is clear is that the economic outlook for China is terrible whatever the authorities do.

"Sticking with zero-Covid would require strict local lockdowns in areas where outbreaks are happening: right now, these areas generate nearly two-thirds of China's GDP," said Mark Williams, the chief Asia economist at the consultancy Capital Economics.

If there was a rapid removal of restrictions, it could risk the Chinese healthcare system being overwhelmed. That could in turn lead to a strict national lockdown with an economic impact similar to that in early 2020, he added.

As one of the biggest buyers of natural resources to power its industrial sector, the prospects of lower demand in China – as a result of lockdowns or ongoing political unrest – could weigh on the world's second-largest economy. These are among reasons why global commodity prices have fallen back.

But while falling oil prices – at a time of sky-high energy costs – could help ease the worst inflationary storm for decades, there are other headwinds to consider.

China has played an increasingly pivotal role in global supply chains in the past 30 years of economic liberalisation, ensuring that lockdowns affecting the country's vast industrial base have major international consequences. This has been clear from the inflation shock rippling through western nations – after demand for manufactured goods roaring ahead of constrained supply chains, as factories struggled with severe delays on deliveries from Asia, shortages of key components, and sky-high freight costs.

Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine exacerbated the shock, sending inflation to the highest level in decades and pushing a third of the world economy into recession – including the UK, several eurozone nations and possibly the US.

There had been hopes the worst of the supply bottlenecks were beginning to fade, including at the Bank of England, where it is part of the consideration behind forecasts for a sharp fall in inflation later next year.

While the prospect of prolonged recessions in the UK and elsewhere will limit demand for goods and services – helping to ease inflationary pressures – the chance of tough new lockdowns in China and renewed supply chain issues could push in the opposite direction.

Major global investors have bet recently that advanced economy inflation is close to, or even at, a peak, which could enable central banks to ease back on tough action to raise interest rates. European equities have rallied by about 20% since early October, while hopes for the US Federal Reserve to "pivot" away from big increases in borrowing costs have risen.

"What's happening in China reminds us of the fact that Covid is still a really big live issue in the world's second-biggest economy," said Ian Stewart, the chief economist at the accountancy firm Deloitte.

For a world economy still reeling from a succession of economic shocks, there are risks of another one developing.

UK retailers launch discounting blitz after month of falling sales

Sarah Butler

▲ *Shoppers on New Street in Birmingham on Saturday. Physical stores are suffering but online retailers have been particularly hard hit. Photograph: Jacob King/PA*

UK retailers have launched a barrage of discounts to try to clear stock after a month of falling sales as soaring inflation and bills hit households' budgets and a warm autumn reduced demand for coats and boots.

On Monday, New Look was offering a 50% discount off all products, Asos up to 80% off almost all lines and Boohoo 30% off everything, with many other fashion retailers – including Marks & Spencer, River Island and Matalan – offering between 20% and 30% cuts.

The discounts came as industry insiders warned a number of online fashion sellers had experienced year-on-year sales falls in November of more than 10%.

Online retailers have been hit particularly hard by a combination of the unseasonably mild weather, which affects sales of higher-priced coats, sturdy footwear and knitwear, the cost of living pinch on shoppers' spending power, and more competition from a high street bouncing back from 2021's Covid lockdowns and Omicron fears.

Despite that recovery, physical stores are still suffering. UK shopping destinations recorded a 4.2% year-on-year uplift in the number of visitors in the week to Saturday 26 November, which included the Black Friday discount day. However, visitor numbers remained 14% down on pre-pandemic levels with coastal and market towns and regional cities particularly struggling to bounce back.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said retailers were "feeling the chill" with sales going into reverse this month and a similar level of decline expected in December after an increase in October.

Its headline retail sales balance – which marks the difference between the percentage of retailers reporting an increase in sales and those reporting a decrease – fell to -19% in November from +18% last month, and is forecast to slide to -21% in December.

Martin Sartorius, the CBI's principal economist, said the survey results "underline what a tough time it is for the sector".

He said: "It's not surprising that retailers are feeling the chill as the UK continues to be buffeted by economic headwinds. Sales volumes fell at a firm pace in the year to November, and retailers remain notably downbeat about their future business prospects. This pessimism is reflected in investment intentions worsening to the greatest extent since May 2020."

Kien Tan, a retail expert at advisory firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, said online retailers appeared to be discounting more as they found life harder. "The overall pie has shrunk for online retailers," Tan said, suggesting discounting was likely to get more intense closer to Christmas as retailers try to clear stock before the economic

Continued *on page 25*

Continued from page 24

crunch expected next year.

However, he said the overall level of discounting appeared to be similar to last year with fewer retailers offering blanket discounts and most focused on trying to shift cold weather gear.

Those with warehouses groaning with piles of unsold fashion built up for the winter are keen to clear unwanted stock as the cost of storage has almost doubled since the pandemic began.

The shipping firm Maersk said low demand and full warehouses mean its clients are reluctant to pick up their imports from ports and it has reportedly offered to slow down cargo ships to ease pressure in the UK.

The Guardian view on China's protests: zero Covid, maximum frustration

Editorial

The extraordinary outbreak of unrest that spread through China at the weekend is of a kind that has not been seen for decades. Protests are not uncommon, given the limited means for people to express their views, but are usually local incidents based on specific grievances. While there have been larger individual protests in the recent past, these have rapidly sprung up across major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan and Chengdu, and now Hong Kong. They have taken place in prestigious universities too.

They challenge a zero-Covid policy that comes from the very top. And though many protesters are cautious or silent – holding up blank sheets of paper to express their dissent – some have called for human rights, press freedom and even the departure of Xi Jinping and the Communist party, only weeks after Mr Xi embarked upon a norm-breaking third term and thus indefinite leadership. Such calls were an incredible act of defiance given the country's increasingly tight political control.

At first, China's coronavirus strategy allowed most people to get on with life as usual, while other countries struggled with repeated lockdowns or high death tolls, or both. But it has long been clear that elimination is not feasible, and a policy now in its third year is causing increasing frustration and economic damage, leading to a growing number of local Covid-related protests.

▲ *Protesters hold up blank sheets of paper to express their dissent at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Monday. Photograph: Kanis Leung/AP*

Chinese audiences watching the World Cup noted unmasked crowds celebrating and realised that plenty of places – not just the reckless US – were living happily without such stringent controls. Then came reports that 10 people, including children, had been killed in a blaze while under lockdown in Urumqi, Xinjiang. Video showed a fire engine vainly trying to spray the building from a distance. Despite the tight security controls in Xinjiang, residents gathered to protest. Surprisingly, the unrest spread to Shanghai, and then onwards, with the case becoming emblematic of other deaths related to the policy and inhumane enforcement.

Officials initially took a relatively hands-off approach, with a few detentions rather than a sweeping crackdown. Extensive surveillance makes later retribution straightforward. But if increased censorship and police presence don't see these protests off, worse may follow. The response in Xinjiang is likely to be harder than in prosperous Shanghai. Those calling for looser controls can expect more lenience than those shouting "Oppose dictatorship". At the local level, especially, there may be piecemeal concessions. The party does not rely solely on repression and propaganda – as potent as they are – but also on recognising people's needs and interests, and meeting some of them, even if belatedly and partially. Yet it has increasingly relied on toughness in recent years.

Many citizens still back zero-Covid measures, regarding them as necessary. The lacklustre vaccination campaign, and refusal to use more effective foreign vaccines, has left elderly people vulnerable. Infections are already rising steeply; further relaxation could see a wave of deaths. The best hope would probably be to declare zero Covid a life-saving triumph, which will allow the country to move to an intensive vaccination programme using imported doses and mitigation measures including masking, testing and isolation, while investing heavily in healthcare. But while authorities recently seemed to be trying to ease some aspects of the zero-Covid policy, shortening quarantine and telling local officials not to "over-enforce" policies, that could, if anything, be put in reverse by these protests. Beijing will not want to appear to bow to pressure.

Whatever the solution, China's people should be free to discuss the decisions being made and the leaders who impose them, and to protest against them. The party does not recognise those rights, of course. But these events should remind it that relying on repression has its limits.

The Guardian view on the Tory energy rebellion: get rid of the onshore wind ban

Editorial

The lesson from the parable of onshore wind is that Rishi Sunak lacks authority, credibility or identifiable policies in key areas. He appears to have few core beliefs that he is willing to stand up for, and looks increasingly vulnerable to determined groups of rebels on his own backbenches. By backing down over an effective ban on land-based windmills, he has U-turned twice in less than a week on the levelling up and regeneration bill. Last Tuesday's volte-face came after dozens of Tory MPs threatened to defy him over housebuilding targets. His reversal over wind power on Monday came after his predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss united against him.

The block on building land-based windfarms in England is absurd. Wind is bringing down the cost of bills as UK households face the biggest cost of living rise in a generation. It helps reduce carbon emissions and dependence on foreign energy imports. Polling suggests onshore wind turbines to be popular with the general public – with no loss in support from those living close to the whoosh of the blade.

▲ *The view of Frodsham wind farm from Helsby Hill in Helsby, Cheshire. Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images*

Yet during the Tory leadership election campaign in the summer, which he lost to Ms Truss, Mr Sunak pledged to keep the ban on onshore windfarms because of the "distress and disruption" they could cause to local residents. Mr Sunak's policy then was about telling the mostly elderly, southern, male Tory party members what they wanted to hear. YouGov in July suggested only 4% of them thought net zero should be a priority.

Once in office, and facing a revolt of cabinet ministers as well as backbenchers, Mr Sunak has decided to relax the ban – but not by much. The prime minister seems likely to install a restrictive planning regime that risks blocking green energy developments and keeping bills high. The onshore windfarm ban survives somewhat intact because of the vexed politics of the English right. Conservative activists and Tory MPs are concerned about being outflanked by rightwing populists who trade in climate denialism and are attached to a turbine-free landscape. This anxiety is heightened by reports that Nigel Farage, who is agitating for a referendum on net zero, is eyeing up a return to frontline

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 25

politics.

With Mr Sunak in charge, Britain ends up in hock to his party's worst instincts. Labour's Ed Miliband is right to call for the scrapping of the onshore wind ban completely. The country has suffered because successive Conservative governments have "cut the green crap" over the past decade. An analysis by Carbon Brief shows that almost all of the energy requirement from the UK's net import of Russian gas in 2021 could have been met if the country had continued to add land-based wind turbines at historical rates. The problem with Mr Sunak is that he does not have an agenda that chimes with British public opinion. The prime minister's strategy is to muddle through and hope for the best. Britain is in the midst of multiple crises. Mr Sunak has only been in Downing Street for a month but he has already exposed how that approach has reached its limits at the heart of government.

Retail therapy: film, art, books and more for the Christmas shopping season

Film

George A Romero's 1968 horror film Night of the Living Dead is one of the most inspired critiques of consumerism in movie history. It is about a zombie uprising caused by a virus from outer space, causing dead people to rise from the grave, driven by a hunger for living human flesh. The film satirises 1960s America's consumerism: people existing in a catatonic state of hunger and thirst and hostility; a metaphor made explicit in the later Dawn of the Dead (1978), set in a shopping mall. Now, in the era of social media, it's even more relevant. All of us scrolling endlessly through our phones, looking dully through material covertly curated by commercial algorithms. People do it on public transport and even walking on the streets … like zombies. *Peter Bradshaw*

***

▲ *Shopping on the brrraaaaiiiins … Night of the Living Dead. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy*

Game

Most games are materialistic: they tend to revolve around the accumulation of resources, be that money or experience points or incrementally better weapons and armour. But there is one game that truly communicates the pleasure of shopping, rather than the grind of it: Animal Crossing: New Horizons. Every day when you walk into Animal Crossing's local store Nook's Cranny, there is a different little selection of beautifully modelled furniture; when Sahara the carpet-selling camel arrives, it feels like an event. It is satisfying to browse the ever-changing wares and choose what to spend your hard-earned bells on, then take it home and put it on display. There is no utility to Animal Crossing's decorative homewares, but that's kind of the point: you're buying them because they look cute, not because they will give you some advantage. *Keza MacDonald*

***

Music

The planet is dying, purse strings are tightening and, for the umpteenth year, everyone in the family has agreed that there is nothing anybody truly needs for Christmas. And yet we all fill up our online baskets as usual, convinced we've found "just a few" essential bargains. Capturing the vicious cycle of this 20%-off feeding frenzy, Leeds newcomer Hang Linton shares Sale, a cautionary tale over a shoulder-bouncing pop-funk beat: "Discounts on discounts / But don't discount the fact / We bought it all for cheap / with the sweat off someone's back". Will we be more prudent next year? Hopefully. But until then, this danceable number cuts to the cold heart of consumerism. *Jenessa Williams*

***

Book

The great Don DeLillo's visionary 1985 novel, White Noise, – adapted this winter into a film by Noah Baumbach – tells us of the holy trinity of shopping: "Mastercard, Visa, American Express". Brand names are repeated like mantras. Children whisper "Toyota Celica" in their sleep. Grown men stand rapt and awed by supermarket displays: "There were six kinds of apples, there were exotic melons in several pastels. Everything seemed to be in season, sprayed, burnished, bright." There are great abundant lists of everything. There is always more merchandise and always the possibility of purchasing more. But there is never a hope of escaping the terror of mortality. No matter how much shopping DeLillo's characters do to distract themselves, they know they are always moving deathward. It is both the bleakest and the funniest investigation of consumerism that money can buy. *Sam Jordison*

***

▲ *A bridge too farm … Animal Crossing: New Horizons. Photograph: Nintendo*

Art

As you struggle through crowded shops counting the Christmas pennies, picture this: L'Enseigne de Gersaint, a dream of shopping as elegant, luxurious delight, painted in about 1720 by Jean-Antoine Watteau, one of the most seductive artists who ever lived. Watteau made L'Enseigne as a shop sign for a Paris art dealer, and surely it must have stopped shoppers in their tracks. As a celebration of art as commerce, it anticipates Warhol by 240 years. Watteau outdoes every perfume ad in the way he makes shopping look sexy. Women's silk dresses shimmer as they exercise their taste in choosing paintings for the mansion, which shopworkers pack. Watteau delights in the comedy and sensuality of life, but he died in 1721 and this tender advert is his last breath. *Jonathan Jones*

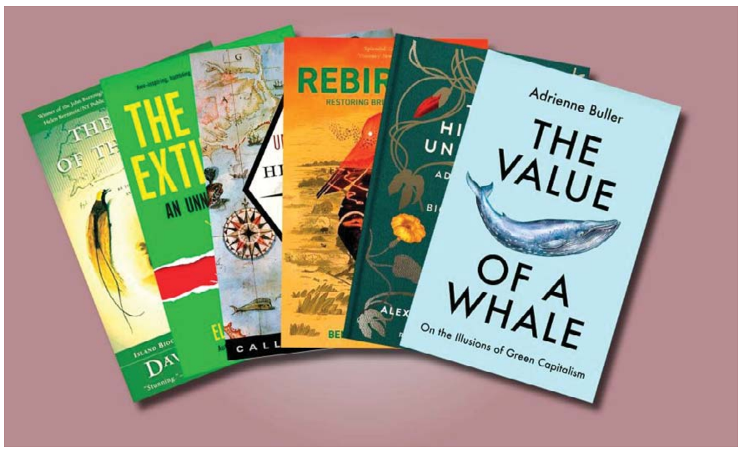
Cop15 essential reading: six books that explain the biodiversity crisis

Guardian writers

The Song of the Dodo by David Quammen

Chosen by Patrick Barkham

Imagine a fine Persian carpet, 12ft by 18ft. Now imagine brandishing a razor-sharp hunting knife and cutting it into 36 equal pieces. When you've finished cutting, there is still nearly 216 sq feet of recognisably carpet-like stuff. But are they nice Persian rugs? No. Each one is small, worthless, and fraying at the edges.



▲ *The six books chosen by our writers.*

This arresting image opens David Quammen's The Song of the Dodo, a prescient, global tour of extinction published just over 25 years ago. The metaphor of an unravelling rug has been used many times since to explain the fate of ecosystem tapestries in an age of extinction; how we pull one thread and the whole system unravels; how we hack away a habitat and fragmented life forms diminish and disappear.

The Song of the Dodo brilliantly showcases island biogeography and tells stories of evolution, destruction and extinction. It explains why losses start on small islands and why they are spreading across the globe as we sequester other species on ever-tinier fragments of wild habitat. We are all small islanders now.

It is a work of diagnosis, not prescription, and there has since grown new awareness of what we must do to halt the catastrophic loss of life on Earth. But the space for non-human nature continues to shrink and extinction races on. Quammen's slim concluding hopes must today be even slimmer.

The Unnatural History of the Sea by Callum Roberts

Selected by George Monbiot

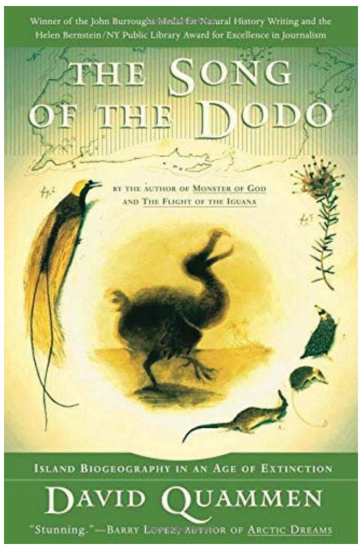
The Unnatural History of the Sea by Callum Roberts is a magnificent ecological investigation of what we have lost. It draws on a vast body of historical research to reveal what the UK's seas are missing: cod the length of an adult human, plaice like tabletops, shoals of herring several miles long being harried within sight of the English shore by packs of bluefin tuna, giant sharks, fin whales and sperm whales …

Only when we understand what once lived here can we begin to restore these natural wonders, mostly by declaring large parts of our seas off-limits to commercial fishing. But because policymakers and the public know so little about what a thriving marine ecosystem looks like, we accept and normalise a state of extreme degradation. It is time to restore the lost glories of the ocean.

The Hidden Universe: Adventures in Biodiversity by Alexandre Antonelli

Chosen by Phoebe Weston

I love the idea of biodiversity as a hidden universe. An estimated 8.7 million species live on land and sea, and this number is probably an underestimate. When you include bacteria and archaea, it could be more like a trillion. But an estimated 99.99% of species which have ever lived have already gone. It makes the 100-400bn stars in the Milky Way look like a pretty paltry number.



▲ *Photograph: David Quammen*

This book encourages readers not to look up but down, at the universe below our feet. It speaks of a world that is more complex, abundant and interwoven than you could dream of. And it reads like an adventure, with lots of details about the author's own travels. It's free from jargon yet manages to navigate all the typically hard-to-communicate points, such as genes, ecosystems and species.

For anyone who still needs winning around to our planet's beauty – and wants to know how we can save it – this is the book they should read.

Continued on page 28

The **only** thing that should influence the news

is the news

Not owners. Not shareholders.
Not advertisers. Independence matters.

Support The Guardian by subscribing.
Visit gu.com/subscribe-to-change

The Guardian

Continued from page 26

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson
Chosen by Anna Turns
Silent Spring is as relevant today as it was when American environmentalist Rachel Carson first published her seminal work 60 years ago. Every chapter is a reminder that we aren't above nature, or able to control it. When we harm biodiversity, we ultimately harm ourselves. As Carson wrote, "in nature nothing exists alone".

This is a wake-up call to the blanket use of dangerously toxic agricultural chemicals. So meticulously informed, rigorously researched, yet accessible to the mainstream, Carson's writing paints two evocative pictures through her suite of characters, from the robin to the gypsy moth. Yes, the indiscriminate spraying of pesticides such as DDT was detrimental to this planet's ecology and our own health. Yet Silent Springemphasises that we have the power to call for change.

"The choice, after all, is ours to make," she writes. Silent Spring sparked the dawn of a new environmental movement, the banning of DDT and the establishment of the US Environmental Protection Agency. Yet production of hazardous chemicals continues to rise exponentially. Banned pesticides linger. Decades on, I have traces of DDT in my own blood. This alarm bell still rings loud. We must listen to it.

The Value of a Whale by Adrienne Buller
Chosen by Patrick Greenfield
As nature takes centre stage at Cop15, so too will market-based solutions to the ecological collapse of life on Earth. Biodiversity offsets have become law in the UK, while conservation NGOs are teaming up with investment banks, asset managers and private equity firms to make nature an investable asset. But do these solutions actually work? Can green capitalism help avert the dual climate and nature crises?

Canadian author Adrienne Buller, director of research at the thinktank Common Wealth, provides a clear, accessible critique of these concepts in The Value of a Whale. The title is based on a 2019 IMF paper that assigned a $1tn-plus value to the world's living "stock" of whales – about $2m a whale – and Buller explores why, despite apparent overwhelming recognition of the crisis in nature and the climate, humanity is so far from actually responding to the problem.

Rebirding: Rewilding Britain and its Birds by Benedict Macdonald
Chosen by Stephen Moss
What I love about Rebirding is its positivity. Quite rightly, Benedict Macdonald acknowledges that we face a double whammy of biodiversity loss and the climate crisis, which threatens not just Britain's birds but also our own existence on this planet. But instead of wringing his hands in despair, he offers positive and practical strategies that could be put into practice right now. These are backed up with facts and figures that show exactly how this could be done. He neatly skewers the oft-quoted notion that Britain "doesn't have enough space", by pointing out that the Scottish Highland estates are more than twice the size of Yellowstone, while Snowdonia – one of the most nature-deprived places in the country – is larger than Kenya's Masai Mara. At a time when the UK government seems hell-bent on destroying our natural heritage, and the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and RSPB are turning into the militant wing of the conservation movement, Macdonald offers us what we need if we are to reverse the damage already done: not just hope, but solutions.

The Sixth Extinction by Elizabeth Kolbert
Chosen by Max Benato
For anyone paying attention to the biodiversity crisis it will come as no surprise that some scientists are calling it the sixth extinction. That is the title Elizabeth Kolbert, a seasoned journalist with a gift for writing, adopted for her 2015 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, which lays out in stark terms exactly what we are facing. But this is not some dry account of how humans are destroying the natural world, though it certainly makes for sober reading. It is a gripping story of the fate of species we have lost, and those we stand to lose if we sit idly by and do nothing. From the demise of the American mastodon and great auk to the threats that loom over the planet today, from the Amazon to the Great Barrier Reef, Kolbert asks the question: "In an extinction event of our own making, what happens to us?"

Find more age of extinction coverage here, and follow biodiversity reporters Phoebe Weston and Patrick Greenfield on Twitter for all the latest news and features

Scrooge: A Christmas Carol review – Netflix's junky musical is a lump of coal

Lauren Mechling

If it ain't broke don't fix it. Unless it's A Christmas Carol, the delightful Charles Dickens classic that nobody will leave well enough alone. If only the latest iteration, Scrooge, were content to revisit a magical old favorite. Instead Netflix's psychedelic musical drains and dilutes, trading the original's wit and heart for belted-out ballads, flame balls and what appear to be fire-eyed and gravity-defying trolls.

Before you write off this review as uncharitably Scroogey, take note: four children, ages eight to 11, gathered round the television to attend the screening. Plied with mugs of sugary cocoa, a frighteningly willing audience heeded the call of duty. Three of them were howling in disdainful laughter by minute two. Up on the screen, an entire village had broken out into a song and dance routine in which they merrily proclaimed: "I Love Christmas!" The fourth child, taking her film critic duties very seriously, quietly scribbled on her notepad: "What the heck???"

▲ *A still from Scrooge: A Christmas Carol Photograph: Courtesy of Netflix*

A rule of thumb in musical theater is that characters should sing only when speaking will not convey their emotion. In this case, though, song is used to dazzle and distract. The kids weren't buying it, and neither will you. Nor will you be terribly impressed with the production values, which languish in a no-man's land on the visual spectrum between old school claymation and acceptably modern. The figures lack dimension in all respects. The voices coming out of them belong to Olivia Colman, Luke Evans and Jessie Buckley, a trio of Netflix alums who may have been possessed by some sense of familial duty to enroll in the streamer's adaptation.

Dickens's novella, originally published in 1843, was storytelling at its most taut and rigorous, a work brimming with humor and humanity. Here was a time travel story with an underlying idea. It wasn't too late for cranky capitalist Ebenezer Scrooge to revisit pivotal moments of his past and reengineer his destiny. This retelling manages to unravel a tightly plotted and emotionally resonant ghost story and lose the logic and poignancy. An ingenious and mystical tale that took on politics and personal trauma has been downgraded into a loud, frosty mess.

If the underlying message is to be decent before it's too late, then be nice to yourself and queue up the berserk and brilliant Muppets Christmas Carol, why don't you? You only live once.

Scrooge: A Christmas Carol is available on Netflix on 2 December

Beaten, jailed, exiled and still taunting Putin: inside Pussy Riot's filthy, furious show

Stuart Jeffries

The first thing you see is a framed portrait of Vladimir Putin propped against a table. The Russian leader looks like a secular icon, like Lenin in his mausoleum, seemingly incapable of human expression. But this being a video installation, there is more. Standing on the table is figure in a long gown and orange balaclava, like Rasputin in women's clothes, or a very unorthodox priest. The figure raises their skirts and a jet of urine spurts over the portrait.

Welcome to Reykjavík and to Velvet Terrorism, an exhibition tracing the decade-long history of Russian art collective Pussy Riot. "Is that you?" I ask Maria Alyokhina, AKA Masha, pointing at the masked urinator? The Pussy Riot co-founder has been showing me, over a video conferencing app, around the exhibition she and members of Icelandic art collective Kling & Bang (Dorothee Kirch, Ingibjörg Sigurjónsdóttir and Ragnar Kjartansson) are installing. Kjartansson, who earlier this year helped Alyokhina flee Russia, holds the phone and gives me a view of Alyokhina at work.

"It's not me," says Alyokhina, thin smile below intense eyes. "It's a new member of Pussy Riot who joined earlier this year." By way of context, she adds: "Putin's Russia has no women in power. Putin surrounds himself with men. The women are to stay at home and accept their role, which is to be protected. I don't want to be protected by him. I'd rather piss on him." Kjartansson, unseen, chips in: "It's such a great take down of the patriarchy. We were assembling a very slick exhibition, tracing the history of Pussy Riot in the past decade. Then Masha arrived and made it very rock'n'roll."

Photos are stuck to the wall with coloured electrical tape. TV monitors howl footage of the various performances and beatings the collective have undergone, such as the time in 2014 when Alyokhina and other members were whipped and pepper-sprayed by Cossacks for protesting at the Winter Olympics in Sochi. The look of the show now has a punk sensibility fitting for a collective whose first songs, 2011's Ubey Seksista (Kill the Sexist) and Osvobodi Bruschatku (Release the Cobblestones), sampled two late 70s British punk classics: the Cockney Rejects' I'm Not a Fool and the Angelic Upstarts' Police Oppression.

When I first meet Alyokhina, she is scribbling text on the gallery wall with what looks like a sharpie. She is writing, in English, an explanation of video footage showing Pussy Riot's breakthrough performance in January 2012 in Moscow's Red Square. That day they played a song called Putin Zassal (here rendered as Putin Pissed His Pants), which included the lines: "The Orthodox religion is a hardened penis / Coercing its subjects to accept conformity."

The next exhibit documents what happened the following month inside

Continued on page 29

Continued *from page 28*

Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Russia was then embroiled in the so-called "snow revolution" against electoral fraud. Alyokhina and four other women smuggled a guitar and amp into the cathedral, donned balaclavas and coloured tights, and performed their Punk Prayer, with lyrics including "Virgin Mary, Mother of God, chase Putin out", and "Virgin Mary, Mother of God, become a feminist".

Alyokhina and other members of the collective were later jailed for inciting religious hatred after the prosecution – incredibly yet successfully – argued that feminism when proclaimed inside a church is heretical.

During Alyokhina's 21-month incarceration in a penal colony in the Ural mountains, Putin's ally and head of the Russian Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill, explained what was expected of women in Putin's Russia. "Man has his gaze turned outward – he must work, make money – and woman must be focused inwards, where her children are, where her home is. If this incredibly important function of women is destroyed then everything will be destroyed – the family and, if you wish, the

▲ *'A seven-year sentence isn't enough – give us 18!' … members of the collective are attacked by Cossack militia in Sochi, Russia, during the 2014 winter Olympics. Photograph: Morry Gash/AP*

motherland." The message was clear: difficult women like Pussy Riot needed silencing to save the Russian motherland.

Alyokhina won't be silenced, though she balks when I suggest that western artists aren't as tough nor as political as she. This is a woman, after all, who while awaiting sentence released a single defiantly proclaiming: "Seven years isn't enough – give us 18!" Later, while in jail, she organised impromptu uprisings and would go on to say: "This is what protest should be: desperate, sudden and joyous."

This spring, after being arrested six times since last summer for protesting against Putin and suspecting another spell in jail was likely, Alyokhina, with girlfriend Lucy Shtein and other members of Pussy Riot, fled Russia disguised as food couriers. Shtein is now in Israel, while Alyokhina and other collective members are nomadic, and have spent much of their time since leaving Russia touring Europe to raise money to support Ukraine and sanctions on Russian oil and gas.

Kjartansson calls me later and we speak alone. "I couldn't say all I wanted about how great Masha is," he says. "It's like talking about Elvis in the presence of Elvis." A longtime Pussy Riot fan, Kjartansson met Alyokhina last December at the grand opening of billionaire Leonid Mikhelson's GES-2 art space in Moscow, which for a few months was hailed as a symbol of a new Russia.

Kjartansson's recreation of the US soap Santa Barbara was the gallery's inaugural attraction. It was a project inspired by the idea that Santa Barbara, the first US soap opera to be screened in Russia, had a powerful impact on post-Soviet culture. To that end, working with a professional film crew, he planned to stage, shoot and release about 100 episodes of the soap in Russian, on an insanely tight schedule of one episode a day performed in the gallery.

"But then the invasion of Ukraine started," he explains, "and I didn't want any part of what Russia was doing. So I withdrew." He wasn't alone. Teresa Iarocci Mavica quit as director of GES-2.

Kjartansson has since put his energies into this Pussy Riot exhibition.

▲ *'The Orthodox religion is a hardened penis' … Pussy Riot singer Maria Alyokhina at The Junction in Cambridge this month. Photograph: Chris Radburn/Reuters*

He wants to show the chutzpah of the collective in turning the power of the oppressors against them, making Putin's thugs and lackeys part of their work. "Be it prison, novichok, whips, ankle tags or exile," says the show's publicity material, "Pussy Riot turn every violent action of the state into art material, shifting the power balance."

I ask Alyokhina when she will go home. "A good question," she smiles sadly. "I don't know. I would like to be there. I miss my home. But not what Putin has done to it."

Velvet Terrorism runs until 15 January

'The films have soul': the Back to the Future fan with his own exhibition

Catherine Shoard Film editor

The third film in the Back to the Future trilogy was released 31 years ago – and there is no prospect of a follow-up.

Unlike similar properties such as Ghostbusters and Star Wars, which have been rebooted frequently over the past three decades, Back to the Future's cultural footprint relies solely on the legacy of those films, as well as ancillary activity such as an animated series, video games and fan convention appearances by cast and crew.

Yet interest in the films, about a time-travelling teenager played by Michael J Fox, is currently at an unprecedented level.

In 2014, a Secret Cinema screening of the film, involving the transformation of a brownfield site near west London's Westfield shopping centre to Hill Valley 1955 – to which Fox's character travels and accidentally disrupts the meeting of his own parents – sold about 80,000 tickets. It was the first major hit for the immersion events brand, which was bought in September this year for $100m.

A musical based on the first film, which opened in the West End last year, won the Olivier award for best new musical and has been seen by more than half a million people so far in London. A Broadway transfer is planned for next summer.

That production was written by Bob Gale, who co-wrote the first film and wrote the screenplays for the second and third films, and was sanctioned by the franchise's creative team. The Secret Cinema show was developed with Universal. But spaces have also opened up for unofficial capitalisation.

▲ *Collector Andrea Sandrone in the DeLorean salvaged from a Universal Studios theme park ride where visitors can sit for a selfie. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian*

Last Saturday an exhibition of movie memorabilia from the films opened in a concrete basement in Camden, London. Back in Time Exhibition: a Tribute to Back to the Future – the title's font as careful not to infringe copyright as its wording – showcases the property of Andrea Sandrone, an Italian superfan, who owns the largest private collection of memorabilia in Europe.

There are 70 items in total: scripts and costumes, props and posters. From the first film: the radiation suit worn by Marty McFly (Fox) and the shirt sported by Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) in the climactic clocktower scene. From the second, set in futuristic 2015, hoverboards, self-lacing Nikes, self-drying jackets and embossed matchbooks from Biffco Enterprises – the lurid corporation owned by series baddie Biff Tannen, a character inspired by Donald Trump.

And from the third film, set in the old west of 1885, guns, newspapers and a pie tin which "invents" the Frisbee. The exhibition's climax is a DeLorean time machine, salvaged from a Universal Studios theme park ride, in which fans can sit for a photo; the exhibition's layout is constructed to be as selfie-friendly as possible.

Back to the Future was the first film Sandrone saw in the cinema, aged 12, and it struck him "like a bolt of lightning". He was inspired to follow a career in physics and, although has yet to achieve his original goal of inventing time travel, made sufficient profits through electrical engineering firm Microtech System to start a Back to the Future collection at the turn of the century.

Sandrone spent an estimated €80,000 and now estimates the value of the collection at $2m. This is a modest assessment; a hoverboard similar to that on display sold in May for £250,000.

Adult tickets for the exhibition, run by an Italian start-up called Next, are £21. The company anticipates 50,000 visitors by February, mostly tourists visiting London but also series devotees who may travel a considerable distance.

"These films have soul," says Sandrone, asked to explain their enduring allure. "Once Disney bought the Star Wars franchise it became only a machine. Many films today exist only to make money."

The decision to not expand the cinematic canon of Back to the Future was, he believes, crucial to the preservation of its purity.

A poll conducted in 2018 found that 71% of cinema audiences wanted a fourth Back to the Future film; considerably more than those eager for further followups to Indiana Jones and Toy Story – which were greenlit.

But Gale has said such a project would be "like selling your kids into prostitution" – and that it would require the participation of Michael J Fox; now impossible because of the effects of the Parkinson's disease from which he suffers.

Ten days ago, picking up an honorary Oscar in Hollywood, Fox spoke of the films as an indisputable career highlight.

Speaking to the Guardian, Gale credited the continued resonance of the films to "a universal human curiosity which transcends time periods and different cultures: how did my parents meet? What did they do on their first date? What were they like when they were kids?"

Gale compares this simplicity to that of a work such as Romeo and Juliet, whose basic premise is: "My parents don't want me hanging out with that person, but I'm going to do what I want." Four hundred years later it still resonates!"

▲ *There are 70 items on show at the exhibition, including costumes worn by actors Michael J Fox (Marty McFly) and Christopher Lloyd (Doc Brown). Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian*

For Andrew Shail, co-author of a BFI study of the film, the high level of retrospective revision built into the original trilogy is also responsible for its cultural longevity. "The implied viewer of the three films knows many things that the characters in the films don't (because most of the characters are from the historical past), and in stressing this difference, the films implicitly and repeatedly put its arm around the viewer and says: 'Look at what we know that they don't – we're in on this joke together, aren't we?'

"Thus, for the vast majority of viewers, a memory of seeing these films is a warm memory of a very personal narrative process."

The timing of those original films is also key, thinks Shail. "The tent-pole films of the 1980s, including Back to the Future, were mostly aimed at young teenagers (hence its PG rating).

"So those people who saw them in cinemas in the 1980s, on VHS tapes in the ensuing years and on television when it was first broadcast are still alive, still connected to popular culture, and even influential in decisions about things like exhibitions of film artefacts."

We report to no one. We report for everyone.
Support The Guardian at gu.com/support
The Guardian

‘There was one prima donna on Star Trek’: George Takei on William Shatner, love and life as an ‘enemy alien’

Simon Hattenstone

▲ *‘At five years old I was an enemy’ … George Takei. Photograph: Luke Fontana*

George Takei is on a mission. But this time the Star Trek actor is not boldly going where no man has gone before. Now he’s boldly going where too many men went before, to ensure history does not forget them.

Takei is about to star in the British production of the musical Allegiance, inspired by his childhood as one of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans forced into internment camps after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. Now a youthful 85, he says it remains the defining experience of his life – one that shaped him as an actor and an activist.

It’s 31 years since he played Sulu in the last of his six Star Trek movies, yet Takei is as prominent as ever. He is outspoken, has a huge social media following, and may be even better known these days as an author (in 2019 he published They Called Us Enemy, a beautifully illustrated graphic novel about his internment) and an LGBTQ+/anti-racist campaigner than he is for Star Trek.

We meet in the penthouse of a London hotel overlooking the city’s landmarks. Takei, who is here with his husband, Brad, is slight, smartly dressed and bright as a sunny day – even when talking about such a bleak subject. He grew up in Los Angeles, one of three children born to a Japanese American mother from California and a father who grew up in Japan. Takei’s father became a successful businessman, running a high-end dry-cleaning store in LA. The family were looking forward to a happy and prosperous future. But that all changed with Pearl Harbor and the designation of Japanese Americans as “enemy aliens”.

It was three weeks after George’s fifth birthday, in 1942, that the military came for the Takeis. “My father came into the bedroom I shared with my younger brother, Henry, and dressed us hurriedly and told us to wait in the living room while they did last-minute packing. Henry and I had nothing to do, so we gazed out of the window and saw two soldiers march up our driveway. They carried rifles with shining bayonets on them and banged on the front door. We were petrified. I can never forget that terror of their banging.” You sense that every time he talks about it he experiences the terror anew. “My father came out of the bedroom and answered the door and they pointed the bayonets at him. Henry and I were frozen. My father gave us each a box tied with twine to carry. He had two heavy suitcases and we followed him out on to the driveway and stood there waiting for our mother to come out. When she finally came out, escorted, she had our baby sister in one arm, a huge duffel bag in the other and tears were streaming down her cheek.”

What Takei didn’t realise at the time was that the terror had been going on for months. Like other Japanese Americans, the members of his family had not been allowed to leave their home between 8pm and 6am. The day after the curfew was introduced his father discovered their bank account had been frozen. “My parents were spat on in the street and yelled at. My father’s car was graffitied with three letters – JAP.”

The Takeis were transported more than 1,600 miles to an internment camp in Arkansas and forced to live in a converted stable. “To take innocent people who had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor and categorise them as enemy aliens was outrageous. At five years old I was an enemy.”

Takei’s father spoke fluent Japanese and English and was elected a block manager in what was the US’s largest internment camp. In 1943, internees were asked to swear their loyalty to the US and forswear allegiance to the emperor of Japan. Takei’s parents refused to do so because the question wrongly assumed their loyalty was to Japan, while demanding allegiance to a nation that had horrifically mistreated them. The family were then sent to the harsher Tule Lake segregation centre in California for “disloyals”. It was here that many prisoners were radicalised, Takei says. Allegiance, in which he stars, explores how internment and the oath of allegiance divided families such as his.

The story of racism and radicalisation has so many echoes with recent times, Takei says. He mentions Donald Trump’s executive order banning people from certain Muslim-majority countries entering the US. “At least we had made progress by the time Trump got into office, because when he signed that executive order, acting attorney general Sally Yates refused to enforce it. When Roosevelt signed the executive order nobody stood up to him.”

He talks about how Trump incited hatred towards the Chinese American population by labelling Covid the Chinese virus. “After he racialised the virus, elderly Asian Americans were physically attacked. In Oakland, California, a young man ran to an old Thai man and smacked him down on the sidewalk. His head hit the concrete and he died.” Takei has astonishing recall of names, events and dates. On the rare occasion he does forget, Brad, a former journalist, fills in.

When the Takeis were released from internment they had nothing left. Japanese Americans were given $25 and a one-way train ticket to re-establish their lives. The family ended up living on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles. As a child, Takei says, it was terrifying. “That was the worst place. Smelly, scary people with eyes like this.” He mimes a zombified junkie. “This guy was staggering towards us one day. And he got closer and closer and he just collapsed in front of us and barfed. My baby sister was four or five and she said: ‘Mama, let’s go back home.’” He pauses. “She meant ‘home’ behind a barbed-wire fence.”

Takei often refers to his parents – the strength of his mother and wisdom of his father. To his great shame, he says, he never appreciated their courage at the time. As a young man, he criticised his father for refusing to sign the oath of allegiance. “I was an arrogant, self-centred teenager. I must have been 13, 14. I said to my dad: ‘You led us like sheep to slaughter back into the camps.’ He had been through the anguish and horror and sense of rage, the whole burden of it, and this young punk was saying to him: ‘You led us like sheep to slaughter.’” Those words still haunt him today. “After I said that my father was silent. I felt terrible. Then he looked up and said: ‘Well, maybe you’re right,’ and he got up and walked into his bedroom and closed the door.”

Takei wanted to apologise, but it felt too awkward, so he told himself he’d do it the following day. It still felt awkward the following day, so he left it another day. He never did apologise to his father. “That’s one of the painful regrets I have.”

Takei went on to study architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, but quit his course after two years to follow his passion – acting. He transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles, where he graduated with a degree and master’s in theatre. In the 1960s, he performed in the civil rights musical Fly Blackbird. The cast sang at civil rights rallies and marched with Martin Luther King. On one occasion, he met King after performing at an event where the church leader was a keynote speaker. “At the end we were ushered down to the basement dressing room to meet Dr King, and this hand shook Dr King’s hand.” He looks downwards and smiles. “This hand didn’t get washed for about three days till my mother put her foot down and said: ‘You must wash.’”

In 1966, Takei was cast as Hikaru Sulu in the original Star Trek TV series. What he loved about the show was its idealism – all nations, races and extraterrestrial humanoid species working together for a better future. When I accidentally refer to it as Star Wars, he quickly corrects me. “We don’t make war – we make peace.” While the show was ostensibly pure entertainment, its originator, Gene Roddenberry, used its storylines to shine a light on contemporary realities such as racism, the cold war and the war in Vietnam.

Was the camaraderie on board the Starship Enterprise reflected on set? “Yes. *Yes. YES*,” Takei says passionately. “Except for one, who was a prima donna.” He is alluding to the show’s star, William Shatner, who played Captain Kirk. “But the rest of us shared a great camaraderie. One of the gifts from Star Trek was not just longevity but colleagues that became lasting friends. My colleagues were part of my wedding party in 2008. Walter Koenig, who played Chekov, was my best man. We asked Nichelle [Nichols, communications officer Uhura] to be our matron of honour but she said: ‘I am not a matron! If Walter can be the best man, why can’t I be the best lady?’ So she became the best lady.”

Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock, was his great campaigning ally. “Leonard was another politically engaged person. We had wonderful discussions.” Did they see themselves as socialists? “No, liberals. I didn’t realise what a loyal friend Leonard was till the latter part of our lives.” He cites the 2014 premiere of the documentary To Be Takei as an example. He had invited Nimoy, but assumed he would not make it because he was so ill. “Leonard came in a wheelchair. He was suffering from COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], and had a tank of oxygen to breathe in, and he parked in the back of the theatre and watched it. I was so touched. I went to thank him, but he was gone by the time I got there. This was just months before he died.”

James Doohan, who played Scotty, was another great friend. “Jim was my favourite drinking buddy. He was a great drinker.” Did he drink Scotch? “He was an Irishman and a Canadian, but he drank enough Scotch to qualify playing a Scotsman!”

Did any of the cast get on with Shatner? He shakes his head. “No, none of us.” Earlier this month, Shatner told the Times that he was astonished that 60 years on cast members were still moaning about him. “Don’t you think that’s a little weird? It’s like a sickness,” Shatner said, adding that Takei had “never stopped blackening my name”.

Today, Takei is reluctant to talk about Shatner. “I know he came to London to promote his book and talked about me wanting publicity by using his name. So I decided I don’t need his name to get publicity. I have much more substantial subject matter that I want to get publicity for, so I’m not going to refer to Bill in this interview at all.” He grins. “Although I just did. He’s just a cantankerous old man and I’m going to leave him to his devices. I’m not going to play his game.”

▲ *George (right) and his brother, Henry, with their father. Photograph: Handout*

One question, I say: was he a cantankerous younger man? “He was self-involved. He enjoyed being the centre of attention. He wanted everyone to kowtow to him.”

Star Trek made Takei a household name, and he used his fame to remind people what had happened to Japanese Americans in the war. He testified at hearings to push for reparations and in 1988 President Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, apologising for the US unjustly locking up a whole generation of Japanese Americans and granting surviving internees $20,000 each in compensation. Takei received his cheque three years later. “It was a massive thing. My cheque was signed by George HW Bush, in 1991. That whole amount went into the founding of the Japanese American National Museum.” Takei is a former chair of the museum.

Although Takei has been with Brad for the best part of 40 years, he didn’t come out until 2005. Ever since, he has campaigned on LGBTQ+ issues. He remembers first feeling attracted to boys when he was nine, had his first sexual relationship at 14 and found it exhilarating, and then for many years denied himself. He says it was hard enough being a Japanese American without being a gay Japanese American. “I knew that because we looked different we were punished and I didn’t want to be punished again for what I was feeling inside. I could hide it. So I started taking girls out for dates. I went out on double dates, but I was more interested in my buddy than my date.”

Takei adored the actor Tab Hunter, who was outed in the 1950s. “He was a matinee idol. Blond and beautiful, always taking his shirt off. He was my heartthrob. One of the scandal sheets exposed him as gay, and a torrent of abuse was thrown at him. I didn’t want to be like that. I must have been in my late teens. I ducked all these things.” Was he celibate? “Occasionally I went to gay baths and had very anonymous sex.”

Is it true that he met Brad at a running club? “Yes,” chimes in Brad, “and I was the most gorgeous member of the club. Drop-dead gorgeous!”

“He was!” Takei says. “Lean and taut.”

“When I first met George, there was a huge age difference,” Brad says. “I was

Continued *on page 31*

Continued *from page 30*

in my early 30s, in the prime of my life. George was in his later 40s, almost over the hill! So he got my best years."

"He was your toyboy?" I ask Takei.

"I was!" Brad says proudly.

Takei laughs. "No no no, I wouldn't use that word. He was …" He looks for a suitable description. "My trainer for my first marathon."

Takei says he worries that many of the gains in LGBTQ+ rights are now in danger of being reversed. In 2011, Tennessee senator Stacey Campfield introduced what became known as the "Don't say gay" bill to ban teachers discussing homosexuality in classrooms. At the time, an appalled Takei suggested that they should substitute the name Takei for gay because it rhymed. "Now Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida, is coming up with the same issue again."

Takei is a busy man. He says he can't see his activism easing up in the current climate. And he is writing more memoirs. Then there is the acting, of course – he can't wait to be back on stage in London with Allegiance.

Before leaving, I ask for a photo with Takei. Brad asks if I can do the Vulcan salute – a raised hand with the palm forward and the thumb extended, while the fingers are parted between the middle and ring finger. I struggle, and ask if he can. "Oh yes! George wouldn't let me be his husband till I could do this." And now the pair are enjoying themselves. Takei shows me another trick. He wiggles his ears.

"He hasn't done that for years!" Brad says. "Simon, you're a very special person! To bring out George's ear wiggle is very special." He looks at Takei. "Go on, George – do the George Takei funny face to camera." And now Takei scrunches his face into a magnificent gurn and the two of them roar with laughter.

Perhaps it's not surprising that Takei is still so boyish. His grandmother lived until she was 104, and he says her favourite hobby was collecting birthdays. Does he hope to be around that long? He nods. "Rather than celebrate birthdays, I celebrate every day. Each day is a gift." He looks down over London from the penthouse, taking in the old and the new on a wet and windy day. "Ah, this *wonderful* English greyness!" he hymns. "This city is dynamic. It's constantly changing. It's alive." The same could be said of George Takei.

● Allegiance is at Charing Cross theatre, London, from 7 January to 8 April

● This article was amended on 28 November 2022. Takei received his compensation cheque from George HW Bush in 1991, not 1981 as we had it due to a mis-transciption error.

To take innocent people who had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor and categorise them as enemy aliens was outrageous

It ain't me babe: Bob Dylan apologises for using a machine to autograph books

Michael Sun and Nadia Khomami

Bob Dylan has issued a rare public statement to apologise for his "error in judgment", amid controversy over his use of a machine to autograph special copies of his new book that had been advertised as "hand-signed".

The book, The Philosophy of Modern Song, features the legendary singer-songwriter's commentary on tracks by other artists and was released in early November, with a limited run of 900 "hand-signed" editions sold for $599 each. All copies came with a letter of authenticity from the publisher Simon & Schuster.

But as buyers began receiving their copies, many shared photographs of their books online – and quickly realised they featured identical signatures.

In a statement, the 81-year-old musician said all of his signatures "over the years" had been hand-signed.

"However, in 2019 I had a bad case of vertigo and it continued into the pandemic years," he wrote. "It takes a crew of five working in close quarters with me to help enable these signing sessions, and we could not find a safe and workable way to complete what I needed to do while the virus was raging.

"So, during the pandemic, it was impossible to sign anything and the vertigo didn't help. With contractual deadlines looming, the idea of using an autopen was suggested to me, along with the assurance that this kind of thing is done 'all the time' in the art and literary worlds.

▲ *'It was an error in judgment': Bob Dylan (pictured performing in 2012) has apologised for using a machine to autograph copies of The Philosophy of Modern Song. Photograph: Christopher Polk/Getty Images*

"Using a machine was an error in judgment and I want to rectify it immediately. I'm working with Simon & Schuster and my gallery partners to do just that."

Simon & Schuster apologised for the controversy last week, and offered refunds to any purchasers who were not happy.

"As it turns out, the limited edition books do contain Bob's original signature, but in a penned replica form," they wrote on Twitter.

The validity of Dylan's signatures on his art prints – many of which are currently retailing for more than £12,000 – has also been called into question. Castle Fine Art, a UK art retailer that sells prints of Dylan's paintings, said they had been "entirely unaware of the use of autopen" and found that only two lines of prints – both released this year – had been signed with an autopen instead of by hand.

"We can confirm that all other editions preceding these releases were individually hand-signed by Bob Dylan himself," they wrote in a statement, offering refunds to buyers – on the condition they return their initial certificates of authenticity "for one reflecting the autopen signature".

The autopen was first patented in the USA in 1803, and allowed a machine to duplicate a person's handwritten letters. The US president Thomas Jefferson was an early proponent, purchasing one autopen for the White House and another for his house in Monticello.

While several other presidents used the system, the White House denied the existence or use of the autopen until Lyndon B Johnson allowed the device to be photographed in the White House, with pictures appearing on the cover of the National Enquirer with the headline The Robot that Sits in for the President.

In 2011, Barack Obama became the first US president to pass legislation with an autopen signature.

But usage of the device by celebrities has continued to draw controversy. In 2020, Ozzy Osbourne was accused of using autopen for a limited number of "hand-signed" copies of his album Ordinary Man. Dolly Parton was also accused of using autopen to sign limited editions of her book Songteller: My Life in Lyrics.

Last year, music legend Van Morrison's management denied he had signed copies of his record, Latest Record Project Volume 1, with an autopen after fans raised concerns. Meanwhile, Sinéad O'Connor threw book retailers into chaos after admitting to using a stamp to inscribe her memoir, Rememberings.

"The books which are signed, I signed using a signature stamp as I was not in a position to hand-write my name 10 thousand times, which is how many I was asked to sign," O'Connor said at the time.

The writer Margaret Atwood conceived of a slightly different machine in 2004 called the LongPen, which enabled authors to sign books remotely. The author can see an image of the page they are signing, write on a touch-sensitive screen, and a robot arm will sign the book hundreds or thousands of miles away with a normal pen.

While the technology failed during a demonstration in London in 2006, the LongPen was used by Conrad Black when he was under arrest to virtually attend a book signing event without leaving his home.

Nicole Kidman surprises Broadway with $100,000 bid for Hugh Jackman's hat

Sian Cain

Nicole Kidman has surprised both Broadway audiences and Hugh Jackman by bidding US$100,000 (A$150,000, £83,000) for a hat signed by Jackman after a performance of her former co-star's musical The Music Man.

During an auction for the charity Broadway Cares/Equity Fights Aids after the performance on Saturday, Kidman made her presence known by shouting her bid of $100,000 for the hat, which led to gasps and cheers in the crowd, then a standing ovation.

"I just want to be clear, this is not Australian dollars," Jackman joked.

"I love you. I love Broadway. And I love what they do, Broadway Cares, but I also want to say this show is extraordinary," Kidman said into the microphone, having approached the stage at the Winter Garden Theatre and hugging Jackman.

"I've known Nic for almost 30 years. I've worked with her. I can tell you this is not a surprise to me. She is one of the most generous souls I know," Jackman said on stage. "You're a beautiful person. I love you. Thank you for your generosity."

The Music Man cast has been raising funds for the charity at recent performances.

Though they are among Australia's most famous actors, Jackman and Kidman have only collaborated a couple of times, leading Baz Luhrmann's 2008 film Australia and providing the voices of penguin parents in both of George Miller's animated Happy Feet films.

The Music Man has been a huge hit on Broadway, generating $2-3m a week in ticket sales. The show will close in January.

'There is a lot to do': Bob Iger outlines vision for Disney as he returns as CEO

Edward Helmore

Returning Disney boss Bob Iger told employees that he will prioritize creativity and profitability at a staff meeting at the company's Burbank headquarters on Monday – outlining a shift from a costly streaming services growth strategy pursued by his predecessor, who was dramatically ousted from the company eight days ago.

Iger, 71, held the top Disney job from 2005 to 2020. After a two-year break, he was reinstated after the company ousted Bob Chapek following an earnings report that showed the company lost close to $1.5bn in just three months on its streaming services platform.

"There is a lot to do," Iger said at the meeting heralding his official return. "Quickly." His entry was met with an ovation and applause. Iger responded by saying he thought he might cry.

Iger, who purchased Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm and Fox for Disney during his last run as CEO, said that rumors of a merger or hook-up with Apple were "pure speculation not rooted in any fact" and the company would not be looking to make any big acquisitions at any time soon.

▲ *Robert Iger was re-instated after the company ousted Bob Chapek following an earnings report that showed the company lost close to $1.5bn in three months. Photograph: Phil Mccarten/Reuters*

"Nothing is forever, but I'm very comfortable with the set of assets that we have," he said.

The Disney veteran faces a difficult task. He must restore morale at the company, particularly at its studio and streaming creative divisions. Disney's theme park cast members will also need cheering after Disney under Chapek got into a bruising dust-up with Florida governor Ron DeSantis over that state's "Don't Say Gay" laws.

Iger said that the company's LGBT employees are very important and that the company cares deeply about them. But he acknowledged that responding to politics can be challenging. "We're not going to make everybody happy all the time, and we're not going to try to," he said. "It's complicated. There's a balance. We do what we believe is right."

Prioritizing Disney's creativity, Iger said he believed working in the office leads to better creativity and teamwork. But he offered no proclamation on an end to post Covid work-from-home arrangements. "There is tremendous value of working in the same place," Iger said. "I'm going to spend a lot of time here, and I hope it is not lonely," he added.

But the chief executive also said that he did not plan to lift a hiring freeze at Disney and that the company would take cost-cutting measures seriously. Disney Plus, like other streaming services, has poured billions into content only to find that post-pandemic lockdowns subscribers are expensive to acquire and often difficult to keep.

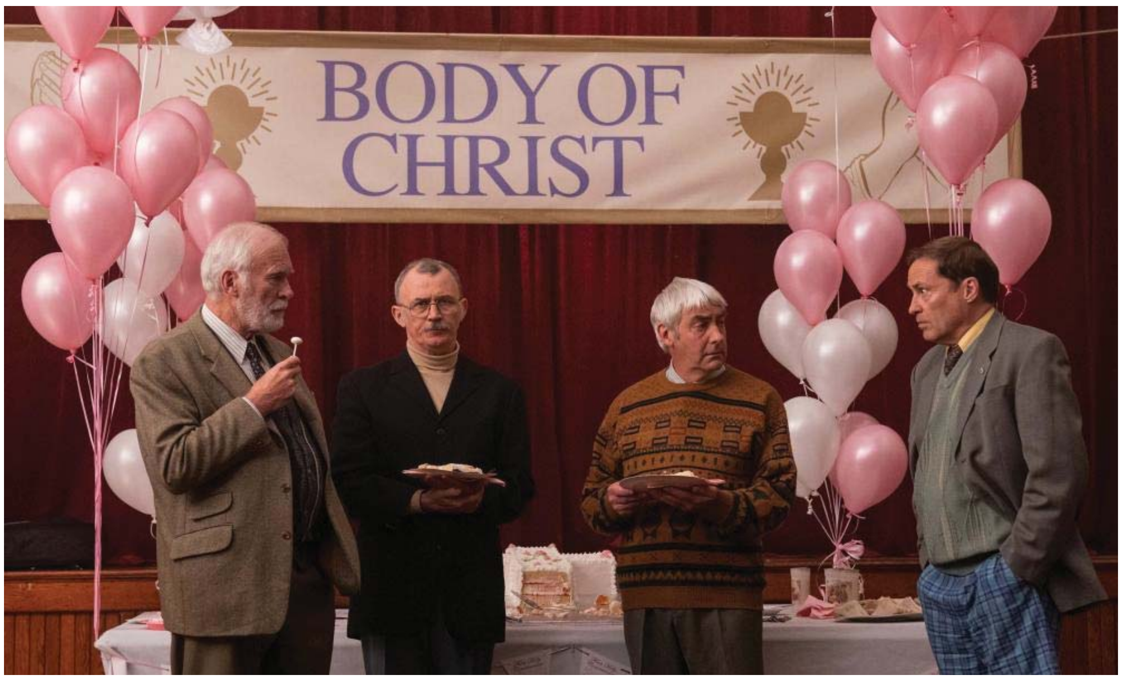
'Those nuns!': why Martin Scorsese must be a devout Derry Girls fan

Stuart Heritage

The Economic Club of Chicago isn't necessarily known for its social media heft. So when Martin Scorsese appeared at its black tie dinner event in October, for a 46-minute discussion about his life and career, it barely made a ripple. Six weeks have passed, though, and finally the details of this momentous occasion have started to leak out. The biggest of them all? Scorsese has seen Derry Girls.

The revelation came at the end of his discussion with Jeffrey Katzenberg, during a speed round in which Scorsese claimed to have wished he'd made Fellini's 81/2 and announced that he preferred to parcel out television rather than binge it. "What are you watching now?" asked Katzenberg. "I watched, the other night, Derry Girls", Scorsese replied. After a small cheer went up in the crowd, Scorsese did a little air punch and added: "Those nuns!"

Obviously this isn't much of a review. At no point during this exchange did Scorsese explicitly say that he enjoyed Derry Girls, but he left his comments vague enough to allow you to project your own thoughts on to it. If you're a fan, the little chuckle he gives before saying "Derry Girls" is a sure sign that he holds the sitcom in high regard. If you're not, then you'll see "Those nuns!" as a way of politely referring to the one thing that he can remember about the show. But it's Derry Girls, for crying out loud. It's great. Of course he liked it.



▲ *Auteur people … Granda Joe (Ian McElhinney), Gerry Quinn (Tommy Tiernan), Uncle Colm (Kevin McAleer) and Cousin Eamonn (Ardal O'Hanlon) in Derry Girls. Photograph: Peter Marley/Channel 4*

And now that his comments have been made public, the reaction has been delightful. Lisa McGee, the show's creator, tweeted: "Excuse me while I drop dead and actually die a death", while Siobhán McSweeney – one of the aforementioned nuns – added: "Good morning. I'm ded". And this is just from the people responsible for Derry Girls. The show is so beloved that seemingly every single person who has ever watched it counts Scorsese's recognition as a tiny personal victory.

That said, it isn't really too much of a surprise that he has seen it. The man isn't just the world's greatest director; he is first and foremost a fan. And don't forget that he watches absolutely everything. Three years ago, Mubi tried to list all of Scorsese's favourite films and TV shows based on past interviews of his, and the list ran to 1,200 titles. There's A Trip to the Moon and Nosferatu, and Gone with the Wind and Blood on Satan's Claw, but he also has a fine eye for comedy. Among his choices are Problem Child, Fawlty Towers and Curb Your Enthusiasm.

Plus, Derry Girls is a nice thematic match with his work. You don't have to be an expert to know about his obsession with Catholicism, which runs through everything from Mean Streets to The Last Temptation of Christ to Silence, so it only makes sense that he'd find an affinity with a show about the realities of attending a Catholic school. Throw in Joe Pesci and a handful of Rolling Stones songs and it would be a completely perfect fit.

Of course, given how low-key the Economic Club of Chicago's black tie dinners are, it's perfectly reasonable to assume that their other esteemed speakers have also made time to point out their love of unexpected entertainment. Bono spoke there in 2018; perhaps he wouldn't shut up about how much he loved Stath Lets Flats. Similarly Bill Gates spoke in 2021, and for all anyone knows he had to be forcibly removed from the stage after stripping off and unveiling his new full-body tattoo of the cast of We Are Lady Parts. And while I don't have any evidence that Barack Obama spoke fondly about my appearance on the Channel 5 talking heads show Most Shocking Celebrity Moments 2015 during his talk 17 months ago, I equally don't have any evidence that he didn't. Nevertheless, this is Derry Girls' moment and they should enjoy it.

The world needs independent journalism, now more than ever Support The Guardian at gu.com/support The Guardian

‘It’s horrendous’: Helena Bonham Carter defends JK Rowling and Johnny Depp

Catherine Shoard

▲ *Helena Bonham Carter pictured in 2019. Photograph: Magnus Sundholm/REX/Shutterstock*

Helena Bonham Carter has come to the defence of her longtime co-star Johnny Depp and of Harry Potter creator JK Rowling in a new interview.

Speaking to the Sunday Times, Bonham Carter said she felt Depp had been “completely vindicated” after his victory in a defamation case against ex-wife Amber Heard this summer.

“I think he’s fine now,” said Bonham Carter. “Totally fine.”

Depp and Bonham Carter have worked together in films such as Corpse Bride, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Alice in Wonderland and Dark Shadows. Depp is also godfather to Bonham Carter’s two children with former partner Tim Burton.

Asked whether she felt the decision of the Virginia jury to award Depp $15m in the suit was a sign of the #MeToo pendulum swinging back, Bonham Carter said: “My view is that [Heard] got on that pendulum. That’s the problem with these things – that people will jump on the bandwagon because it’s the trend and to be the poster girl for it.”

During the trial, Depp denied striking Heard and accused her of lying about his alcohol and drug use. In 2020, Depp lost a libel case in the UK against the Sun newspaper, which had described him as a “wife beater”.

A high court judge ruled that the paper’s allegations were “substantially true”.

Bonham Carter also expressed scepticism about whether someone’s personal life, if legal and consenting, should affect their professional prospects.

“Do you ban a genius for their sexual practices? There would be millions of people who if you looked closely enough at their personal life you would disqualify them. You can’t ban people. I hate cancel culture. It has become quite hysterical and there’s a kind of witch-hunt and a lack of understanding.”

She also came to the defence of JK Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, in whose film adaptations she played Bellatrix Lestrange. Rowling has been accused of transphobia after statements around gender politics and the protection of children and vulnerable women.

“It’s horrendous, a load of bollocks,” said Bonham Carter. “I think she has been hounded.”

She continued: “It’s been taken to the extreme, the judgmentalism of people. She’s allowed her opinion, particularly if she’s suffered abuse. Everybody carries their own history of trauma and forms their opinions from that trauma and you have to respect where people come from and their pain. You don’t all have to agree on everything – that would be insane and boring. She’s not meaning it aggressively, she’s just saying something out of her own experience.”

Asked about the wisdom of the film’s three key younger stars – Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint – speaking out about Rowling’s remarks, Bonham Carter said: “Personally I feel they should let her have her opinions, but I think they’re very aware of protecting their own fanbase and their generation.”

Dawn Breaks Behind the Eyes review – cult status beckons for Euro horror homage

Phuong Le

▲ *Like a magician revealing his tricks … Dawn Breaks Behind the Eyes. Photograph: PR*

From the atmospheric lighting that drips in primary colours to the spooky setting of a gothic castle in ruins, the retro aesthetics of Kevin Kopacka’s second feature pay tribute to the twisted pleasures of 1960s and 1970s European horror movies: giallo, fantastique, and the like. Ruled by emotional as well as physical dysfunction, this film opens with an ill-fated car trip taken by an overbearing husband and his reticent wife to an abandoned country estate which the latter has inherited.

The dilapidated condition of the isolated location eerily mirrors the deteriorating mental states of the characters. Even if the plotting is intended as pastiche, the visuals maintain an impressive balance between homage and distinctiveness. Nevertheless, just when viewers might think they know what’s coming, the film suddenly lifts the curtain on its own smoke and mirrors, like a magician revealing his tricks. Without giving too much away, the unexpected rupturing of make-believe finds the narrative splintering in numerous directions, ultimately painting a fragmented portrait of toxic love.

If the first half is a faithful callback to the golden days of Euro horror, the later stages attempt to subvert the problematic gender dynamic that often exists in these cult classics – resulting in the film being burdened with an overly ambitious baggage of ideas. As the intricate set pieces grow more abandoned – a shot of writhing bodies interlocked in an orgy is particularly memorable – the script turns rather disjointed, if not nonsensical. Not that it may matter: it’s the sensuality of the images in, for example, a Jean Rollin film that lingers on, rather than the details of the story. Dawn Breaks Behind the Eyes will be an acquired taste, but for fans of the genre, it has the potential of becoming a cult favourite.

● Dawn Breaks Behind the Eyes is released on 2 December in cinemas.

We report to no one.
We report for everyone.
Support The Guardian at gu.com/support
The Guardian

Here are some crucial issues we're covering in 2023 – with your help

Betsy Reed

On election night this November, the Guardian's reporters fanned out across the country, keeping close watch on key races targeted by the election-denial movement instigated by Donald Trump. Candidates who embraced Trump's "big lie" about the 2020 election sought control over pivotal offices that would allow them to tip the balance toward Trump when he tries to reclaim the presidency in 2024.

To the relief of our readers, as well as millions of Americans, their efforts failed spectacularly.

Across the country, many Americans rejected campaigns based on lies and racist demagoguery. Voters flocked to the polls to protest the supreme court's attack on abortion rights in its reversal of Roe v Wade earlier this year. Reproductive freedom and democracy proved more resilient than many dour pundits had predicted.

But if we pause to celebrate this outcome, we should also reflect on how we arrived at such a dangerous moment – and how much danger remains. Authoritarian forces, emboldened by Trump but long predating him, still possess cultural influence and institutional power. As the legendary activist and scholar Frances Fox Piven recently told the Guardian's Ed Pilkington, the fight over elemental democracy is far from over. "The fascist mob doesn't have to be the majority to set in motion the kinds of policies that crush democracy," she said.

▲ *Students march for abortion rights in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 24 June 2022. Photograph: Renée Jones Schneider/AP*

As the new editor of Guardian US, I'm determined to dedicate our journalistic resources to the scrutiny of those dangerous forces in 2023 – with your help. This Giving Tuesday, please consider a year-end gift to the Guardian to support our journalism in the coming year.

Here are three of my priorities for the Guardian US newsroom in 2023:

Abortion rights. There are few areas where Trump's damaging legacy is more evident than reproductive rights. His appointments to the supreme court, made with the intention of ending the constitutional right to abortion, will profoundly affect the health and freedom of people in this country for years to come. We'll be reporting on the human impact of abortion bans – and the inspiring movement that is fighting back.

The climate crisis. Despite the Biden administration's landmark law to decarbonize the US economy, fossil fuel emissions continue to rise, and Republican control of the House of Representatives will bring with it aggressive attempts to roll back progress. We'll be closely tracking the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act, including efforts by the fossil fuel industry and the right wing to stymie change. We will also double down on our groundbreaking environmental justice coverage, exposing how communities that lack racial and economic privilege bear the brunt of government and corporate negligence.

Investigations. In 2023, we'll be digging deeper into the powers secretly shaping the contours of American life. We know a lot, for example, about the toxins tainting our food and water – but it takes a different kind of reporting to pin down the corporate actors responsible for spreading them, and the government regulators who have failed to protect the public. From police unions to gun manufacturers to crypto titans to rightwing pressure groups, we will reveal the influential networks whose machinations lie at the root of the crises we report on every day, whether it's racism in the criminal justice system or soaring economic inequality.

I'm thrilled to work at the Guardian because I know it's a special place with a unique role in the global media ecosystem. At this moment of jeopardy for democratic values, we don't settle for milquetoast, down-the-middle journalism that engages in false equivalence in the name of neutrality. We know there is a right and a wrong side in the fight against racism and climate destruction and for democracy and reproductive justice. Our newsroom is passionately dedicated to delivering timely, fair, accurate reporting to readers who care about the issues we cover as much as we do.

Our business model reflects our values, too. Rather than relying on billionaire owners or pursuing profits to appease shareholders, we depend on support from readers. Your donations are the reason we are able to carry on with our work. If you can, please consider a gift to fund our reporting in 2023. We are very grateful.

Rishi Sunak searches for Tory compromise over onshore wind U-turn

Jessica Elgot, Peter Walker and Helena Horton

Rishi Sunak is scrambling to find a compromise on permitting onshore wind amid a growing backbench Conservative rebellion, though No 10 remains fearful of a backlash from MPs who oppose windfarms.

The U-turn on backing onshore wind projects would directly contradict a pledge by Sunak during his leadership campaign but Downing Street has sought to frame it as government policy.

The government all but confirmed on Monday that restrictions on onshore wind would be changed in the face of the rebellion, but the row has left Sunak squeezed between two wings of the party – with a growing number of MPs also using the levelling up bill to try to put the brakes on development.

▲ *Rishi Sunak is also beset by a brewing backbench row over housing targets. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock*

Labour is also tabling a new beefed-up amendment on onshore wind, highlighting the limitations of the Conservative rebel amendment, which has been drafted by the former cabinet minister Simon Clarke and backed by Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

The Guardian understands that the former chief whip Wendy Morton has signed the amendment, bringing the total number of potential rebels to 34 – which would evaporate Sunak's majority.

The full Labour amendment, tabled on Monday night and seen by the Guardian, would remove the onerous planning restrictions that effectively ban new onshore wind in England but also require local authorities to proactively identify opportunities for renewables, including onshore wind generation.

Labour will back Clarke's amendment – putting Sunak at risk of Commons defeat – but said it was not enough to ensure real growth of onshore wind.

Matthew Pennycook, the shadow housing minister, said: "Rishi Sunak is now being dragged into an inevitable U-turn by his backbenchers and, while it's better than nothing, the Clarke amendment still leaves Britain hobbled in the race for renewables.

"Because, while ending the ban, it imposes a uniquely restrictive planning regime for onshore wind that risks blocking sensible schemes, keeping bills high, and missing out on the next generation of high-skilled jobs. Under this government, we're forced to move only at the pace of the slowest Tory backbencher."

Clarke is understood to have told Conservative backbenchers that his amendment was also a "community consent" safeguard against a future Labour government, which would be likely to make it easier for local authorities to build windfarms.

"His argument is, either we do it or Labour do it in future, without this lock," one supportive MP said.

On Monday, the business and energy secretary, Grant Shapps, said there would be more onshore wind projects "where communities are in favour of it", which would mean the end of a de facto block on such projects since 2014 under planning rules.

Shapps told Sky News: "We already have quite a lot of onshore wind. There will be more, over time, particularly where communities are in favour of it. That is, I think, the key test of onshore

Continued *on page 35*

Continued from page 34

wind: is it of benefit to communities locally? That has always been the principle for us, for quite some time now."

Pushed again on whether this was an enforced change of stance, Shapps said: "No, it's exactly what we've said all along. Rishi Sunak said the other week that where onshore happens, it needs to have local agreement."

Shapps said incorrectly that Sunak had "always" argued that onshore wind could happen with local consent, adding: "To present it as some sort of massive gulf is completely untrue."

No 10 pulled a planned vote on the bill this week in the face of the rebellion on housing targets – which is separately putting the government under pressure. The added problem of Clarke's amendment means the bill is likely to be further delayed.

Labour's amendment, which the Conservative rebels are unlikely to back, has been drafted with the Green Alliance and the Town and Country Planning Association, who have also put forward suggestions to Clarke about gaps in his amendment.

Chris Venables, the head of politics at Green Alliance, said of Clarke's amendment: "It's not perfect as it is a campaigning amendment. The second part needs to put in place measures that ensure the planning system does genuinely shift it forward."

A new poll on Monday from the thinktank Compassion in Politics found 72% of Conservative voters supported the building of more windfarms. Overall when asked which source of energy they would prefer to see boosted in the UK, three-quarters said they would support onshore wind.

Evidence grows of forced labour and slavery in production of solar panels, wind turbines

Adam Morton Climate and environment editor

The Australian clean energy industry has warned of growing evidence linking renewable energy supply chains to modern slavery, and urged companies and governments to act to eliminate it.

A report by the Clean Energy Council, representing renewable energy companies and solar installers, has called for more local renewable energy production and manufacturing and a "certificate of origin" scheme to counter concerns about slave labour in mineral extraction and manufacturing in China, Africa and South America.

Released on Tuesday, the paper said slavery in all supply chains was a global problem. But Australia is on a trajectory towards generating the vast majority of its electricity from solar, wind, hydro and batteries by 2030 and needs to play an active role in addressing it in renewable energy industries.

"We're at a moment in time when renewable energy supply chains are going to be scaling up significantly," Dr Nick Aberle, the Clean Energy Council's energy generation and storage policy director, said. "That means now is a critical opportunity to shape the future direction of those supply chains."

Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup

The report cited detailed allegations of forced labour and slavery in supply chains for solar and wind energy and battery storage. Examples included that:

About 2.6 million Uyghur and Kazakh people have been subjected to coercion, "re-education programs" and internment in the Xinjiang region of north-west China, which is the source of 40-45% of the world's solar-grade polysilicon. A report by the United Nations office of the high commissioner for human rights three months ago found Xinjiang was home to "serious human rights violations", and the US has listed polysilicon from China as a material likely to have been produced by child or forced labour.

On batteries, there were major issues with the mining of between 15% and 30% of the world's cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Amnesty International found that children, some as young as seven, were working in artisanal cobalt mines, often for less than $2 a day. Mining conditions were reportedly hazardous, and workers often did not have adequate protective equipment and were exposed to toxic dust that contributed to hard metal lung disease.

On wind energy, there had been rapid growth in demand for balsa wood used in turbine blades that had reportedly led to workers in Ecuador's Amazon region being subject to substandard labour conditions, including payment being made with alcohol or drugs. The demand for balsa has also reportedly increased deforestation, and affected the land rights of Indigenous people in Peru. Some balsa wood suppliers have more recently provided Forest Stewardship Council certifications, which verifies responsible forest management and fair wages and work environments.

▲ *Australian Uyghurs protesting in Sydney. A new report has linked renewable energy supply chains producing solar panels and wind turbines to forced labour in regions such as Xinjiang in north-west China. Photograph: Flavio Brancaleone/EPA*

NSW's anti-slavery commissioner, Dr James Cockayne, said urgent action was needed to address "the severe modern slavery risks in Australian renewable energy supply chains and investments".

"We need to see industry, government, the financial sector and civil society working together to provide access to competitively costed, slavery-free renewable energy," he said. "If we don't, modern slavery risks significantly complicating the just transition to a decarbonised economy."

Aberle said the government should create a taskforce of government, industry and civil society representatives to develop a plan to ensure Australia's clean energy supply chain was "reliable, cost effective and slavery free". He said strategies that should be explored included whether to establish domestic supply chain capabilities and how to improve "traceability and detectability" within existing supply chains.

The report, compiled with the consultants from Norton Rose Fulbright, cited the US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which came into force earlier this year and created a presumption that any products made in Xinjiang were linked to modern slavery and could not be imported into the US unless an importer provided "clear and compelling evidence" that there was no slavery in a product's supply chain.

It said a globally recognised certificate of origin scheme would be complex but was "imperative to achieving landmark change". Existing examples of work in this area included a solar stewardship initiative launched in September 2022 and a global battery alliance that was developing a "battery passport" system to improve traceability.

The Australian and US governments earlier this year said they wanted to break their near-complete reliance on China for clean energy and critical mineral supply chains, citing evidence the country was responsible for about 80% of solar energy technology manufacturing.

'Still creeped out': Queensland activist asks Adani to destroy surveillance photos taken of family

Ben Smee

The environmental activist Ben Pennings says covert surveillance of his family members by a private investigator – hired by the mining giant Adani – continues to cause "concern" and "anxiety", according to a letter requesting the company hand over and destroy any photographs of them.

Guardian Australia revealed in 2020 that a private investigator working for Adani took photographs of Pennings walking his nine-year-old daughter to school.

Court documents detailed how the investigator also surveilled Pennings' wife, trawled her Facebook page and followed her to work at a Brisbane psychology practice.

Adani is suing Pennings, as the national spokesperson of the group Galilee Blockade, alleging he sought to disrupt the operations of the Carmichael coalmine, its suppliers and contractors. That case is ongoing.

Before launching the civil action against the activist, the Indian conglomerate unsuccessfully sought an Anton Piller order to conduct an unannounced search of Pennings' family home.

The surveillance photographs and an affidavit from a private investigator were tendered to the Queensland supreme court for the ex parte search order application, which was rejected. An appeal by Adani was also unsuccessful.

Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup

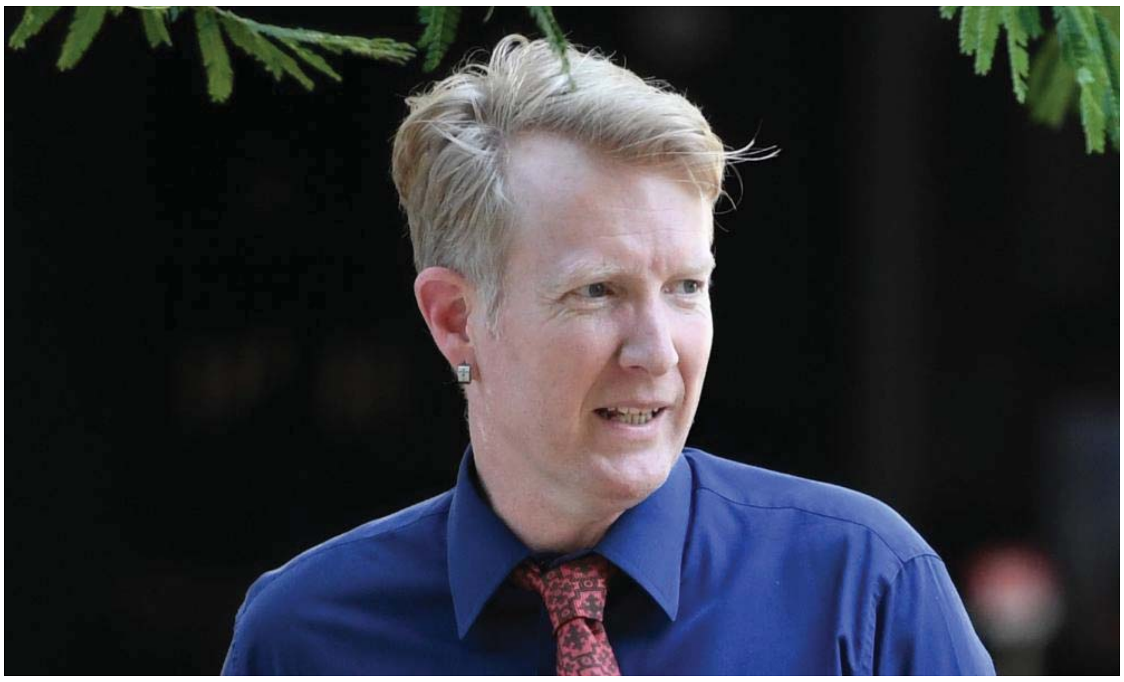
In separate letters sent to Adani last week and seen by Guardian Australia, Pennings and his wife say the photographs are of "no bearing to current proceedings", as the Anton Piller application has concluded. They have requested the photographs be handed over, and then deleted from any records.

"I was both panic-stricken and furious when I discovered that Adani hired burly security contractors from the war in Afghanistan to secretly follow and photograph my nine-year-old daughter. Two years later I'm still creeped out," Pennings says in his letter to Adani.

"It is upsetting to me and my extended family that, despite it having no bearing on current proceedings, photo-

Continued on page 37

Continued *from page 35*



▲ *Anti-Adani coalmine activist Ben Pennings has written to the mining company asking for any photos to be handed over and destroyed. Photograph: Darren England/AAP*

graphs of a nine-year-old girl taken without her consent are still being stashed away by Adani or their representatives.

"My eldest daughter was 20 when representatives of Adani were following and photographing her little sister. Two years later she still experiences anxiety that she is also being followed, photographed and otherwise investigated."

Pennings said none of his children were party to legal proceedings against him and that they "should not have to suffer concern or anxiety that photographs taken without their consent are being held by a company dragging their father through harrowing litigation in the supreme court."

He says any photographs of his daughter taken at or near her Brisbane primary school could include other students, and that these should be relinquished to the school.

Pennings' wife, a psychologist, has requested any photographs of herself, her children and possible clients taken near her practice be relinquished.

"I felt physically sick when Ben told me that men hired by Adani had been following our nine-year-old daughter around, taking photographs of her without her consent," she wrote to the company.

"I still don't know how many days or weeks she was secretly followed and how many photographs of her were taken.

"I also do not know whether you followed and photographed my two teenagers on their way to school or other activities. Like them, I have nothing to do with the proceedings against my husband. Yet Adani also hired men to follow me to my psychology practice, potentially compromising client confidentiality.

"This was clearly done to intimidate me and my children and you've certainly succeeded."

On Monday Adani said the matter "relates to documents in the ongoing civil litigation between Adani and Mr Pennings".

"We have instructed our solicitors to contact Mr Pennings' legal representatives, which is the appropriate course of action," the company said.

"As the civil litigation is ongoing, we have no further comment at this time."

No 10 set to allow new onshore wind projects in England in U-turn

Peter Walker Political correspondent

▲ *The U-turn would mean the end of an effective ban on onshore wind projects since 2014 under planning rules. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images*

Downing Street appears likely to allow new onshore wind projects in England after years of an effective ban, Grant Shapps has indicated, with ministers giving way in the face of a growing backbench Conservative rebellion.

Shapps, the business and energy secretary, said there would be more onshore wind projects "where communities are in favour of it", which would mean the end of a de facto block on such projects since 2014 under planning rules.

While Shapps sought to present the idea as already proposed by Rishi Sunak, this is not the case. The U-turn instead appears to be a direct response to an amendment to a bill tabled by Simon Clarke, the former levelling up secretary, which Labour is also expected to support

Clarke, one of a growing list of Tory MPs, including Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, to oppose a ban, has tabled an amendment to the levelling up bill to allow new onshore wind projects in England.

Asked about the issue, Shapps told Sky News: "We already have quite a lot of onshore wind. There will be more, over time, particularly where communities are in favour of it.

"That is, I think, the key test of onshore wind – is it of benefit to communities locally? That has always been the principle for us, for quite some time now."

Shapps denied the government was backing down over fears it would lose a vote on the Clarke amendment. He said: "I don't recognise it in those terms at all. Simon Clarke has put in an amendment, which I haven't studied all the ramifications of yet.

"But it's essentially saying what I just said to you, for local people to have a very, very keen say in this, which is indeed government policy. There are always different ways to skin a cat, as it were, but we will have a close look at what is being proposed."

Pushed again on whether this was an enforced change of stance, Shapps said: "No, it's exactly what we've said all along. Rishi Sunak said the other week that where onshore happens it needs to have local agreement."

Shapps said incorrectly Sunak had "always" argued that onshore wind could happen with local consent, adding: "What is being proposed [in Clarke's amendment] is something which would guarantee that. I haven't studied all the ramifications of that in terms of the planning changes, but to present it as some sort of massive gulf is completely untrue."

During the summer campaign to become Tory leader, where he lost to Liz Truss, Sunak released what he termed an energy independence plan, which stated: "In recognition of the distress and disruption that onshore wind farms can often cause, Rishi has also promised to scrap plans to relax the ban on onshore wind farms in England, providing certainty to rural communities."

Clarke's amendment would oblige the government to change planning rules within six months to allow new projects.

It is not yet known when amendments to the bill will be voted on. Last week, No 10 pulled a scheduled vote after a rebellion over planning policy.

An amendment led by the former cabinet minister Theresa Villiers and backed by more than 50 Tory MPs seeks to scrap mandatory local housing targets and make them advisory only.

Asked whether the government was about to U-turn, the prime minister's official spokesman said: "You'll know there are quite detailed rules around onshore wind and what is allowed - it requires developers to consult with communities in advance [of making] a planning application. So I'm not going to predict what might happen in the future. "The prime minister has talked at great length about his views on where the focus should be on renewables, where he is talking about building more wind turbines offshore in order to boost energy security and also the importance of ensuring communities support any action the government takes on renewables."

The world needs independent journalism, now more than ever

Support The Guardian at gu.com/support

The Guardian

Queensland will continue coal exports 'as long as the market dictates' despite emissions targets

Australian Associated Press

▲ Queensland treasurer Cameron Dick and premier Annastacia Palaszczuk are defending coal exports from the state. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

Queensland carbon emissions targets will dramatically change in coming years, but coal exports will continue for "as long as the market dictates", Annastacia Palaszczuk says.

The premier has promised to slash her state's emissions 30% below 2005 levels by 2030, and achieve net zero by 2050.

The plan is almost entirely focused on energy supply, which mostly comes from publicly owned coal power plants.

The state has motivation to decarbonise rapidly, with climate disasters having cost it about $30bn between 1979 and 2019, according to a Climate Council report released Monday.

Palaszczuk has refused to commit to more aggressive emissions cuts, but said she was open to the possibility.

"We are working very hard and these targets will change, and I think they'll change dramatically over each decade," she said on Monday.

Scope three emissions from Queensland's coal exports are also in focus after the state's land court on Friday recommended a planned thermal coalmine be refused.

The court found the project would have "unacceptable climate change impacts" on Queenslanders, no matter where the coal was burned in the world.

However, the government is aware that at least 12 thermal and metallurgical coalmines plan to be operating after 2050 – and some continuing after 2100 – according to documents obtained by the Australian Conservation Foundation after a right to information request.

Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup

The deputy premier, Steven Miles, said those mines would be needed for steelmaking coal to make renewable energy generation parts, which the government wants to do in Queensland.

"Coal from those mines will be accounted for in the places where it's burned, and where it is used," Miles said.

"But much of that – about 80% of Queensland's coal – is metallurgical coal used for steelmaking, and at this stage we don't have a way to make these [wind] turbines without that coal."

"And so we will continue our effort to decarbonise our state's economy, but we will do it in a way that is responsible and in a way that makes a significant contribution to the global effort to address climate change."

Queensland produced 282.5m tonnes of coal in 2021, according to state government data, and is the country's biggest exporter.

Palaszczuk said future coal production and exports from Queensland will depend on global demand.

"The world is moving very, very quickly, but what we do know is, as the deputy premier said: metallurgical coal is needed for steelmaking," the premier said.

"That will continue as long as the market dictates."

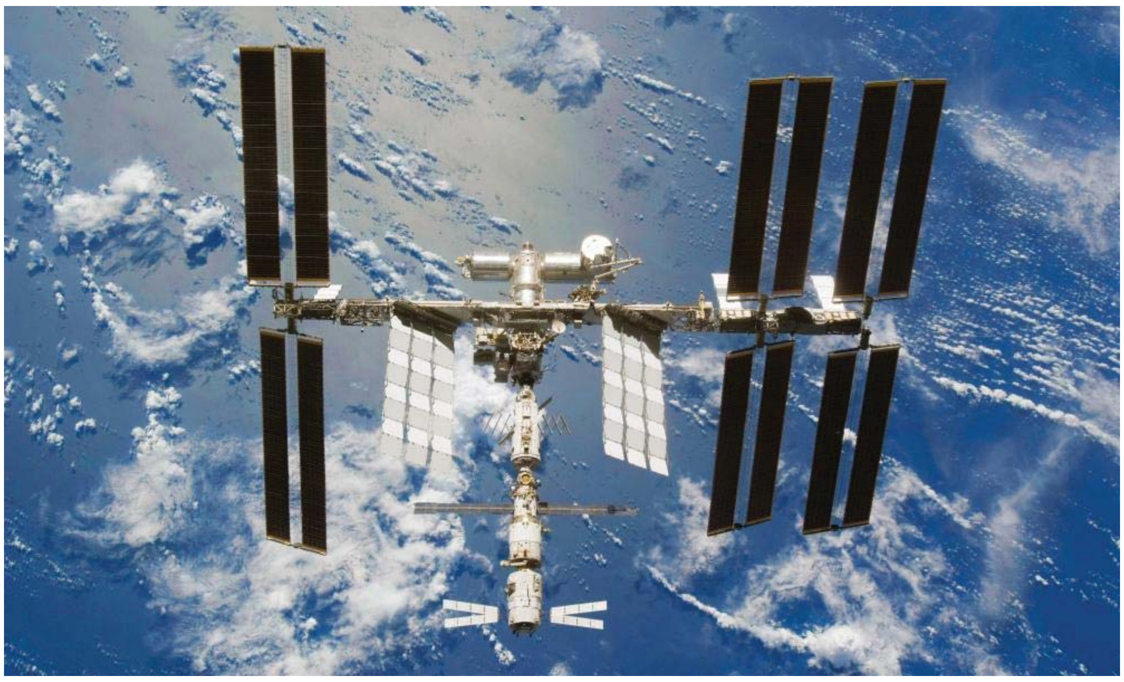
Palaszczuk announced a $2bn deal with Spain's Acciona Energia to build a 1,000MW windfarm in the MacIntyre wind precinct, near Warwick.

The project will help the government meet its other climate target of 70% of energy demand at any time being met by renewable sources by 2032.

"While industry partnerships like this will be critical to bring more cleaner, cheaper energy into the system, we will importantly still maintain majority public ownership of the Queensland energy system, meaning we will control our energy transformation," the premier said.

'Life no longer as we know it': war in space would have devastating effects, military experts say

Tory Shepherd



▲ A tiny piece of debris from a destroyed satellite could seriously damage spacecraft such as the International Space Station, which manoeuvres to avoid them. Photograph: AP

It would no longer be "life as we know it" if a space war destroyed the satellites that the world now relies on, space commanders have warned, and China and Russia have demonstrated that they're capable of doing just that.

Senior military leaders from the US and Canada are in Sydney for an Australian Strategic Policy Institute conference on space as the new frontier in "commerce, industry, competition and war". They have discussed the importance of working with allies, including Australia, to counter the threats posed by space war.

Lt Gen Nina Armagno, staff director of the US Space Force, said Russia's destruction of one of their own satellites last year was a "stunning display".

"We're interpreting that … as a message and demonstration of capability," she said.

Brigadier general Michael Adamson, commander at 3 Canadian Space Division (Canada's space force), said on behalf of Canada: "No way … holy crap, this is a topsy turvy world, you can't do that."

"Same with us," Armagno said.

She said China was openly documenting and describing its demonstrations of power in space. Asked what the end game could be, she said, "Life as we know it would no longer be as we know it."

Attacks on satellites can take out GPS systems, banking systems, power grids, first responders' communications, and impact on military operations, they said.

"I don't want to be dramatic," Armagno said. "What does war in space look like? We probably won't see it with our naked eye but we will definitely feel the consequences from the moment it begins."

She also described China's 2007 destruction of one of its own satellites as shocking, irresponsible and intentional. The US was also concerned about an occasion last year where a Chinese satellite with a grappling arm moved another satellite out of orbit.

Adamson said Russia's own space program was faltering, leaving it less reliant on space infrastructure. That in turn makes it more likely to "salt the Earth", or destroy access to space, because it has "less to lose", he said.

There are two ways attacks on satellites could take out communication networks. A direct attack – through an-

Continued *on page 39*

Continued from page 38

ti-satellite missiles, grappling arms, or hacking or jamming a satellite – is one. The other is the debris created by a destroyed satellite. Armagno said the US was still tracking 600 pieces of debris from China's 2007 "demonstration".

Even a tiny piece of debris could seriously damage spacecraft such as the International Space Station, which manoeuvres to avoid them. The Russian event created 1,500 pieces of debris, which threatened cosmonauts and astronauts on the ISS.

Armagno said the US and its allies, including Australia, needed to work together to make space more resilient. That included building nimbler, smaller satellites in order to replace any that are destroyed. Australia was developing a number of such satellites and the ability to launch them into orbit, she said.

"It's important for societies to understand the relevance of space," Armagno said.

"It's not space for the sake of space, it really is for likeminded countries to ensure that space is free for spacefaring nations. We all share those values."

Air commodore Nicholas Hogan, the Australian Defence Space Command's space capability director general, spoke at the conference about the ability of China to "outpace" Australia.

"That's why we [Australia, the US and Canada] work together," he said.

Hogan said the use of anti-satellite technology was a "wicked" problem.

"If somebody had done something in a terrestrial domain, air, land or sea that had a lasting impact of more than a decade, no one would have stood for that," he said.

"But in space, there's no laws, there's no rules, there's no norms … and this is the area in which we find ourselves. [It's] one of those wicked problems."

Ancient barn conversion with steam room found at Roman villa in Rutland

Harriet Sherwood

If you thought barn conversions were a relatively recent development for the property-owning classes, you'd be wrong – probably by 16 or 17 centuries.

Archaeologists at the site of a Roman villa complex in the east Midlands have discovered that its wealthy owners converted an agricultural timber barn into a dwelling featuring a bathing suite with a hot steam room, a warm room and a cold plunge pool.

Fresh evidence of the villa owners' lavish lifestyle comes two years after a family found fragments of ancient pottery on a ramble through farmland in Rutland. Archaeologists from the University of Leicester, in partnership with Historic England and Rutland county council, later unearthed a rare mosaic depicting Homer's Iliad.

The finding – now protected by the government – was described as "the most exciting Roman mosaic discovery in the UK in the last century".

▲ *The bathing suite at the Roman villa in Rutland.*

Now the same team has unveiled further discoveries at the site, including the conversion of a barn the size of a small church.

The barn was supported by large timber posts and may have had two storeys. It was converted to stone in the third or fourth century, with one end becoming a dwelling with many floors, and the other retained for agricultural or craft work.

The main feature of the dwelling was a Roman-style bath suite with sophisticated underfloor heating and heating ducts built into the walls. A tank outside the building may have been used to collect water from the roof.

The team also revisited the area of the mosaic which was thought to be laid in a dining room, known as a triclinium, within the main villa building. They discovered fragments of polished marble, broken stone columns and painted wall plaster that hint at grand decoration.

The dining room had been built as an extension to the main villa, suggesting that the owners wanted a special area for feasting as they gazed over the Iliad mosaic.

The new excavations also revealed additional mosaics in the corridors leading to the dining room, including one with a kaleidoscopic geometric design.

John Thomas, the deputy director of the University of Leicester archaeological service, said: "It's difficult to overstate the significance of this Roman villa complex to our understanding of life in late Roman Britain. While previous excavations of individual buildings, or smaller-scale villas, have given us a snapshot, this discovery in Rutland is much more complete and provides a clearer picture of the whole complex.

▲ *Work at the villa site.*

"The aim of this year's work has been to investigate other buildings within the overall villa complex to provide context to the Trojan war mosaic. While that is a wonderful, eye-catching discovery, we will be able to learn much more about why it was here, and who might have commissioned it, by learning about the villa as a whole."

Duncan Wilson, Historic England's chief executive, said the site had "posed many questions about life in Roman Britain". Its significance would become clearer as the evidence was examined over the next few years by specialists, he added.

Starwatch: the moon and Saturn will look great together

Stuart Clark

Look for a pretty pairing of the moon and the planet Saturn this week. Saturn is currently due south in the early evening and cruising through the constellation of Capricornus. It will appear to be the brightest star in that particular region of sky, and will have a slightly yellowish tinge. The moon will be unmistakable with almost 40% of its visible surface illuminated.

New moon took place on 23 November, and the moon is currently waxing. It will reach first quarter, or half-moon, on 30 November. Its meeting with Saturn takes place on 29 November.

The chart shows the view looking south from London at 17.00 GMT that evening. Once you've found the moon and Saturn, look over to Jupiter, which is further east. It will be brighter and whiter than Saturn. If you are in a dark site, trace out the faint stars of Capricornus itself. If this proves too challenging because the moon is too bright, return another night this week and try again when our natural satellite will have moved on. The conjunction is also easily visible from the southern hemisphere. From Sydney, Australia, the pairing takes place in the western sky and is easily visible throughout the evening.

Covid blood-thinner drug treatment dangerous and does not work – study

Denis Campbell Health policy editor

A blood-thinning drug given as a potential life-saver to many patients recovering from severe Covid does not work and can cause major bleeding, research shows.

The findings have led to calls for doctors to stop advising people to take Apixaban, because it does not stop them from dying or ending up back in hospital and also can have serious side-effects.

▲ *Apixaban has been given to patients hospitalised with severe Covid. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA*

The anticoagulant is given to patients when they are discharged after a spell in hospital being treated for moderate or severe Covid. It is widely used by hospitals across the NHS.

However, the UK government-funded Heal-Covid trial has found that it does not work.

Prof Charlotte Summers, the chief investigator of the trial, said: "These first findings from Heal-Covid show us that a blood-thinning drug, commonly thought to be a useful intervention in the post-hospital phase, is actually ineffective at stopping people dying or being readmitted to hospital.

"This finding is important because it will prevent unnecessary harm occurring to people for no benefit," added Summers, who is an intensive care doctor at Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge.

Dr Mark Toshner, the co-chief investigator of the study, said: "This trial is the first robust evidence that longer anticoagulation after acute Covid-19 puts patients at risk for no clear benefit.

"Our hope is that these results will stop this drug being needlessly prescribed to patients with Covid-19 and we can change medical practice."

Guidelines drawn up by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) recommend that patients in hospital with Covid are given blood-thinning therapy for 14 days, even if they are discharged during that time.

Doctors keen to find effective treatments against Covid hoped that the drug would reduce the risk of people suffering blood clots by thinning their blood. However, during the trial, which was run by experts from Addenbrooke's and Cambridge University, some of the 402 participants who received the blood thinner suffered serious bleeding

Continued on page 40

Continued from page 39

that led to them coming off the drug.

The trial team also found that while 30.8% of Covid patients who received standard care ended up back in hospital within a year, only a slightly smaller proportion of those on Apixaban did so (29.1%).

Summers said that Nice had recommended blood-thinning therapy even though when it undertook a synthesis of the evidence around the issue in 2020 it found no clinical trials of post-hospital anticoagulationin discharged Covid patients, and called it a decision "based on consensus rather than evidence". At the time, 11 different countries around the world had issued treatment recommendations for the post-hospital stage of the illness.

● This article was amended on 28 November 2022. The guidelines drawn up by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the comments included from Prof Charlotte Summers regarding these guidelines, both relate to blood-thinning therapy in general, rather than to Apixaban specifically as an earlier version indicated. This has been corrected.

Paw and order: Lucy the labrador provides support as Australia's first full-time court dog

Kieran Pender

When Lucy enters a courtroom at the federal circuit and family court in Melbourne, she bows to the judge – as is customary. Only Lucy is no ordinary court attender. She is a five-year-old chocolate labrador deployed as a "court facility dog" as part of a pilot program to provide support for people in court .

Lucy, who is Instagram-famous through her handle @courtdoglucy, is the first accredited court dog working full-time in Australia. She belongs to the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions and for the next three months is on loan to the family court one day a week.

"The court is mindful that litigation experiences can be stressful, especially for families," said a judge, Amanda Mansini. "The court dog initiative is aimed at providing support and comfort to those that need it at various stages of the court process."

The use of court dogs is not novel. The US justice system has been using them for almost a decade, with more than 300 court dogs in action.

▲ Lucy's home is the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions but she will visit the Melbourne family court one day a week as part of a pilot program. Photograph: Office of Public Prosecutions Victoria

In New Zealand, Tauranga district court piloted a court dog named Louie who became a national celebrity. Successive justice ministers visited Louie to have their photo taken with him – the justice ministry even issued a statement of condolence after Louie died. His successor, Mabel, last month won the silver medal in New Zealand's "top dog" competition.

"These [overseas] experiences tell us that a court dog is especially helpful to vulnerable people, such as children, victims of domestic violence, and also those of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds," Mansini said. "It really seems to be a developing trend in the justice system."

There is scientific research showing the positive physiological and psychological effects of dogs for humans, including in the legal context. "The science tells us that the mere presence of a dog that is specially trained for the justice environment reduces cortisol levels and anxiety," Mansini said.

Lucy is trained to be calm and supportive in any stage of a legal matter, for children and adults. She is being deployed in court hearings, while witnesses give evidence, as well as during legal interviews, mediations and more. The court has been notifying parties and practitioners of Lucy's scheduled attendance, so people who may be afraid of dogs, have allergies or cultural concerns can opt out.

Although Lucy is still new to the family court in Melbourne, the early feedback has been good. "The reaction of the whole court has been overwhelmingly positive," Mansini said.

The pilot will run until February. If feedback from staff and court attenders remains positive, the family court will consider making the program permanent – although they'll need to find another court dog, as Lucy will be returning to the Office of Public Prosecutions.

▲ 'The science tells us the mere presence of a dog that is specially trained for the justice environment reduces anxiety.' Photograph: Office of Public Prosecutions Victoria

Mansini, who is a former Fair Work Commission deputy president appointed to the circuit and family court this year, is a big fan. "Lucy is absolutely beautiful," she said. "She has a range of tricks, but one of the most endearing tricks in the courtroom environment is that she's been taught how to bow – which is really sweet."

The big idea: how keeping warm wards off loneliness

David Robson

As winter approaches, warm-blooded animals have two ways to cope with the cold. The first is anatomical, building a layer of fat under the skin and shedding their svelte summer coat for a snug winter pelt.

The second is social: they can huddle. From mice, voles and rabbits to Himalayan marmots and Barbary macaques, individuals in a group will gather together so that they can share the heat radiating from their bodies and avoid the risk of dying from exposure.

According to a new theory of social thermoregulation, humans have a similar instinct. Brain scans show that the regions associated with temperature control and social behaviour are intimately connected and each can influence the other. When we are physically cold, we feel loneliness more keenly and yearn to be physically and emotionally close to others. Conversely, when we feel emotionally excluded, we start to feel that the temperature has dropped and seek warmth to comfort our bruised egos.

Like those other mammals, this may be hard-wired in our brains through evolution. While humans may not physically huddle, our ancestors would have been reliant on the support of others for food, fuel and shelter – and this would have been especially important when it was cold. The result? We may be especially sensitive to others when the temperature drops, and we are likely to seek other sources of warmth if we feel that we can no longer rely on the group for support.

▲ Illustration by Elia Barbieri.

This new way of viewing human behaviour emerged in the late noughties. Until then, many scientists had assumed that the connection between temperature and social emotion was purely metaphorical. When we feel close to someone, we celebrate their "warmth", and when we are shunned we feel that we have been given the "cold shoulder" or an "icy stare". But there had been no reason to think that there might be something concrete behind these figures of speech.

Professors Chen-Bo Zhong and Geoffrey Leonardelli at the University of Toronto were among the first to investigate this possibility. In one experiment, the researchers asked participants to recall a time when they felt excluded or included. They were then asked to guess the temperature of the room, and the estimates of those who had remembered a time of rejection were about 3C (5.4F) lower than those of the people who had dwelled on a time of social connection. The thoughts of rejection had made them feel physically colder – as if they really had been "frozen out".

Zhong and Leonardelli next turned to a video game called Cyberball, which attempts to recreate the kind of social rejection that many of us might have experienced in the playground. The participant is ostensibly placed in a group of three and asked to play virtual catch with two other people, hidden out of sight. In reality, two of the players are controlled by a computer. In the beginning, these computerised players are programmed to throw the ball to the human, but after a while they may begin to shun the participant, so that he or she no longer feels part of the game.

Despite the fleeting nature of the interaction, the majority of participants reported feeling sad and rejected after being excluded by the other players. And this seemed to prime them to look for sources of warmth as comfort. They were more likely to want hot foods like coffee or soup and not cold things, like Coca-Cola.

There is some evidence that feelings of rejection may even change the

Continued on page 41

Continued *from page 40*

body's actual temperature. Prof Hans IJzerman at the Université Grenoble Alpes hooked a thermometer to the fingers of Cyberball players. He found that their skin temperature dropped by around 0.4C (0.72F), while those who felt included saw a slight rise.

Importantly, the link between temperature and social perception goes both ways. Studies show that if you are already cold, and are then asked about your sense of social connection, you are likely to report feeling lonelier than if you had been asked in warmer conditions. As a result, you feel a greater desire to seek out other people. And there is a good reason that people want hot food when they're feeling rejected: when IJzerman gave participants a cup of tea after they had played Cyberball, they reported feeling less hurt by the social exclusion.

Weather conditions can even change the media that people consume. Studies of movie rentals show that when it's cold outside, we are disproportionately more likely to watch romance films compared with other genres, which, the researchers propose, may be a way of satisfying an increased desire for social connection.

Like all psychological findings, these results will need to be replicated in large and diverse sets of participants, but if the social thermoregulation theory holds up, it may have serious implications for our mental health. Anecdotally, patients with depression often report feeling permanently cold, and there's some experimental evidence that their bodies struggle to adjust to changes in temperature. A greater understanding of these mechanisms might suggest new treatments for this disorder.

More immediately, with the soaring fuel bills and potential blackouts coming down the tracks, we may need to consider the emotional effects of the cold this winter. Besides the obvious physical discomfort, the extra chill in our houses may make us more sensitive to exclusion and rejection, and with small slights taking on a new importance, we may feel particularly needy for affection from loved ones. The emotional effects of the cold could be particularly problematic for people living alone, who may find it harder to heat their houses and become especially conscious of their loneliness as the temperature drops.

Clearly, practical solutions to the fuel crisis must come first, but given the emotional implications, we might also look for ways to connect more with those around us. Like those huddling animals, we could all benefit from exchanging a little more warmth – both physical and social – this winter.

● *David Robson is the author of The Expectation Effect: How Your Mindset Can Transform Your Life.*

Further reading

Heartwarming: How Our Inner Thermostat Made Us Human by Hans Rocha IJzerman (WW Norton, £19.99)

The Keys to Kindness: How to be Kinder to Yourself, Others and the Planet by Claudia Hammond (Canongate, £14.95)

Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection by John T Cacioppo and William Patrick (WW Norton, £12.99)

The extra chill in our houses may make us more sensitive to exclusion and rejection

Apple TV 4K 2022 review: cheaper but still premium streaming box

Samuel Gibbs Consumer technology editor

Apple's latest TV streaming box is faster, smaller, more efficient and cheaper than its predecessors, making it one of the best and most reliable smart TV experiences you can get.

The third-generation Apple TV 4K costs from £149 ($129/A$219). While £20 cheaper than last year's model, it is still a premium over rivals from Google, Amazon and others, which are priced at between £50 and £140.

The same simple and discreet rounded black box design is now 20% smaller and about half the weight of previous versions. It comes in two versions: with or without ethernet and Thread networking, a system to connect smart home devices.

Inside there are two key changes. The newer A15 chip, the same as in the iPhone 14, is 50% faster than the A12 chip it replaces. It is far faster than all the competition and total overkill for a streaming box, unless you use it as a games console with Apple's Arcade service or games from the App Store. Otherwise, the new chip is more energy efficient and will ensure the box stays rapid for a very long time.

The other addition is support for the HDR10+ video format, which is used by Samsung televisions and a key feature for many owners. It still supports Dolby Vision, HLG and standard HDR10 for everyone else, too.

tvOS 16

Speed aside, the Apple TV's killer feature is its comprehensive app support that far outstretches the competition in both availability and quality. Every major streaming service is available on it, including Amazon, Disney+, Netflix and YouTube (with Google Play Movies). It has all the UK services such as BBC iPlayer, ITVX, Channel 4, My5, STV Player, UKTV Play, Now, BT Sport, BritBox, Sky Go and others. It is a similar story in other countries too. The apps are generally better, more stable and see more support than other platforms.

▲ *Apple's streaming TV box is smaller and faster than ever, offering a better experience than rivals at a premium. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian*

Apple's various apps and services are integrated, of course, including TV +, Fitness+, Music, iCloud Photos and Arcade. You don't have to use any of them, but a free Apple ID is required to use the box.

Another advantage is its simplicity and lack of ads on the homepage, which can't be said of most other smart TV platforms. The interface looks like a smartphone screen with app icons you click on with the remote to get going. You can move the apps around so your favourites are where you want them, while a dock of sorts sits right at the top.

By default, Apple's apps sit in this top row, but you can put whatever you like there. Hover over the Apple TV app and it will recommend content to you with big flashy pages in the background. Or you can switch it to displaying the next episode of shows, such as the next episode of Andor from Disney+ or House of Games from iPlayer, which I find more useful. Multiple user profiles within tvOS allow some of these recommendations to be customised to each member of your family, but individual apps still require you to select who is trying to watch the content on bootup.

Siri works as a universal search, accessed through a button and mic on the remote. Press and hold the button to ask for a show or movie via voice to find where it is available based on the apps you have installed. If you don't already have access to the content, it will show you the price to rent or buy it from Apple.

The voice assistant can also open apps, control playback, answer content-related questions and control smart home devices, but occasionally you'll run into questions it can't answer on the TV that it will on an iPhone, which is a bit odd.

The Apple TV can be used without any other Apple devices, but if you're an Android-only user there are better options from Google or Amazon available.

If you do have an iPhone or iPad, it unlocks some very handy features. You can instantly set up the Apple TV just using an iPhone, use it as a full remote, use the keyboard on your phone or tablet to enter text and passwords, or confirm purchases with your face or thumb, among other bits. You can also send video and audio from Apple devices to the TV via AirPlay 2, but it does not support Google's Cast.

While you can connect any Bluetooth headphones for private listening, more than one compatible set of Apple's AirPods or Beats headphones can be used at the same time, which is extremely handy for late-night movie marathons with another person.

Sustainability

The Apple TV 4K contains recycled aluminium, gold, tin and plastic. Apple breaks down the streaming box's environmental impact in its report. It consumes about 0.002kWh of electricity per hour of 4K HDR video streaming. The box is generally repairable, costing from £125 out of warranty to fix. Apple offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products.

Price

The Apple TV 4K 2022 comes in two versions starting at £149 ($129/A$219) with 64GB of storage or £169 ($149/A$249) with 128GB of storage and an additional ethernet port and Thread networking support.

▲ *The iPod-like remote now charges via USB-C rather than Lightning, but still lasts months between charges. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian*

For comparison, the Nvidia Shield TV costs £105, the Google Chromecast with Google TV 4K costs £60, the Roku Streaming Stick+ costs £45 and the Amazon Fire TV Cube costs £140.

Verdict

There are cheaper streaming boxes available, and every television comes with a smart TV built in. But if you want a simple, reliable and high-quality streamer, the third-gen Apple TV 4K is unbeatable.

It is very fast. It has the broadest catalogue of streaming apps available, which are typically better than on any other platform, too. It supports all the key video formats and Dolby Atmos. And there aren't adverts cluttering up your home screen.

It is particularly good if you're an Apple user already. While you can use it without an iPhone or iPad, there are easier options for Android users from Amazon and Google.

Don't buy this if you have a perfectly good Apple TV currently running fine. It runs the same software with most of the same features. But if you're sick of a poor smart TV interface and want a premium experience to deliver the quality content you already pay for, this is it.

Now AI can write students' essays for them, will everyone become a cheat?

Rob Reich

Parents and teachers across the world are rejoicing as students have returned to classrooms. But unbeknownst to them, an unexpected insidious academic threat is on the scene: a revolution in artificial intelligence has created powerful new automatic writing tools. These are machines optimised for cheating on school and university papers, apotential siren song for students that isdifficult, if not outright impossible, to catch.

Of course, cheats have always existed, and there is an eternal and familiar cat-and-mouse dynamic between students and teachers. But where once the cheat had to pay someone to write an essay for them, or download an essay from the web that was easily detectable by plagiarism software, new

Continued *on page 42*

Continued from page 41

AI language-generation technologies make it easy to produce high-quality essays.

The breakthrough technology is a new kind of machine learning system called a large language model. Give the model a prompt, hit return, and you get back full paragraphs of unique text. These models are capable of producing all kinds of outputs – essays, blogposts, poetry, op-eds, lyrics and even computer code.

Initially developed by AI researchers just a few years ago, they were treated with caution and concern. OpenAI, the first company to develop such models, restricted their external use and did not release the source code of its most recent model as it was so worried about potential abuse. OpenAI now has a comprehensive policy focused on permissible uses and content moderation.

But as the race to commercialise the technology has kicked off, those responsible precautions have not been adopted across the industry. In the past six months, easy-to-use commercial versions of these powerful AI tools have proliferated, many of them without the barest of limits or restrictions.

One company's stated mission is to employ cutting edge-AI technology in order to make writing painless. Another released an app for smartphones with an eyebrow-raising sample prompt for a

▲ 'Artificial intelligence has created powerful automatic writing tools.' Photograph: Andriy Popov/Alamy

high schooler: "Write an article about the themes of Macbeth." We won't name any of those companies here – no need to make it easier for cheaters – but they are easy to find, and they often cost nothing to use, at least for now. For a high school pupil, a well written and unique English essay on Hamlet or short argument about the causes of the first world war is now just a few clicks away.

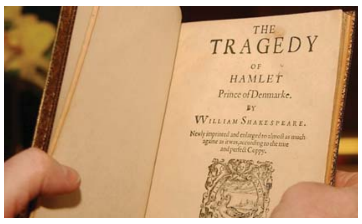
While it's important that parents and teachers know about these new tools for cheating, there's not much they can do about it. It's almost impossible to prevent kids from accessing these new technologies, and schools will be outmatched when it comes to detecting their use. This also isn't a problem that lends itself to government regulation. While the government is already intervening (albeit slowly) to address the potential misuse of AI in various domains – for example, in hiring staff, or facial recognition – there is much less understanding of language models and how their potential harms can be addressed.

In this situation, the solution lies in getting technology companies and the community of AI developers to embrace an ethic of responsibility. Unlike in law or medicine, there are no widely accepted standards in technology for what counts as responsible behaviour. There are scant legal requirements for beneficial uses of technology. In law and medicine, standards were a product of deliberate decisions by leading practitioners to adopt a form of self-regulation. In this case, that would mean companies establishing a shared framework for the responsible development, deployment or release of language models to mitigatetheir harmful effects, especially in the hands ofadversarial users.

What could companies do that would promote the socially beneficial uses and deter or prevent the obviously negative uses, such as using a text generator to cheat in school?

There are a number of obvious possibilities. Perhaps all text generated by commercially available language models could be placed in an independent repository to allow forplagiarism detection. A second would be age restrictions and age-verification systems to make clear that pupils should not access the software. Finally, and more ambitiously, leading AI developers could establish an independent review board that would authorise whether and how to release language models, prioritising access to independent researchers who can help assess risks and suggest mitigation strategies, rather than speeding toward commercialisation.

After all, because language models can be adapted to so many downstream applications, no single company could foresee all the potential risks (or benefits). Years ago, software companies realised that it was necessary to thoroughly test their products for technical problems before they were



▲ 'A well written and unique English essay on Hamlet is now just a few clicks away.' Photograph: Max Nash/AP

released – a process now known in the industry as quality assurance. It's high time tech companies realised that their products need to go through a social assurance process before being released, to anticipate and mitigate the societal problems that may result.

In an environment in which technology outpaces democracy, we need to develop an ethic of responsibility on the technological frontier. Powerful tech companies cannot treat the ethical and social implications of their products as an afterthought. If they simply rush to occupy the marketplace, and then apologise later if necessary – a story we've become all too familiar with in recent years – society pays the price for others' lack of foresight.

Rob Reich is a professor of political science at Stanford University. His colleagues, Mehran Sahami and Jeremy Weinstein, co-authored this piece. Together they are the authors of System Error: Where Big Tech Went Wrong and How We Can Reboot

Pegasus spyware inquiry targeted by disinformation campaign, say experts

Stephanie Kirchgaessner in Washington and Sam Jones in Madrid

Victims of spyware and a group of security experts have privately warned that a European parliament investigatory committee risks being thrown off course by an alleged "disinformation campaign".

The warning, contained in a letter to MEPs signed by the victims, academics and some of the world's most renowned surveillance experts, followed news last week that two individuals accused of trying to discredit widely accepted evidence in spyware cases in Spain had been invited to appear before the committee investigating abuse of hacking software.

"The invitation to these individuals would impede the committee's goal of fact-finding and accountability and will discourage victims from testifying before the committee in the future," the letter said.

It was signed by two people who have previously been targeted multiple times by governments using Pegasus: Carine Kanimba, the daughter of Paul Rusesabagina, who is in prison in Rwanda, and the Hungarian journalist Szabolcs Panyi. Other signatories included Access Now, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales, and the Human Rights Foundation.

One MEP said it appeared that Spain's "national interest" was influencing the committee's inquiry.

The invitation to one of the individuals – José Javier Olivas, a political

▲ Pegasus is made by NSO, an Israeli company that was blacklisted by the Biden administration in 2021. Photograph: Joel Saget/AFP/Getty Images

scientist from Spain's Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia – was rescinded but the other, to Gregorio Martín from the University of Valencia, was not and he is expected to appear before the parliamentary panel on Tuesday.

At the centre of the controversy lies the European parliament's committee investigating the use of Pegasus, a powerful surveillance tool used by governments around the world. Pegasus is made and licensed by NSO Group, an Israeli company that was blacklisted by the Biden administration last year, after the US said it had evidence that foreign governments had used its spyware to maliciously target government officials, journalists, businesspeople, activists, academics and embassy workers.

Researchers at Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto and Amnesty International's Security Lab have documented its use in countries including Spain, Poland and Hungary.

While their findings have been used and accepted as evidence in courts in the UK and the US, they have come under sustained attack in recent months by a small but vocal group of individuals who have sought to question the researchers' conclusions in ways dismissed as unfounded and conspiratorial by security experts.

The letter accuses Olivas of engaging in a pattern of harassment against researchers, including by "promoting conspiracy theories and false claims about researchers", victims and institutions in more than 500 posts on Twitter.

Olivas told the Guardian he rejected the accusations and had requested a formal explanation from the committee about his rescinded invitation. He also said he had complained to the president of the European parliament.

"I believe that this case can be illustrative of the risk of instrumentalisation of a committee of inquiry by third parties with vested interests. It sets a dangerous precedent. Giving in to pressures from third parties to filter evidence before a hearing goes against the principles of any serious investigation," he said. He said he did not have any relationship with the current or previous Spanish governments.

Martín was invited as a "peer reviewer" on a research paper experts said had frequently been promoted even though – the letter alleged – it contained basic technical errors and false statements about some Pegasus victims.

Martín said in an email to the Guardian he had been "hurt" by the letter seeking to disqualify him but that he was busy preparing his testimony and trying to be "as positive as possible". He declined to respond to specific allegations raised in the letter.

"I definitely think there is a national influence on the work of the inquiry committee," said Saskia Bricmont, a Belgian MEP and member of the Greens/European Free Alliance group. "Spain is showing its national interest, but not just Spain."

Two people close to the parliamentary committee said it was not entirely clear why Olivas and Martín had been invited, but that they believed their names had been put on a preliminary agenda by Spanish members of the centre-right European People's party (EPP) group.

Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez, Spain's interior minister from 2016-18 at the height of the Catalan independence crisis and now the EPP's coordinator on

Continued on page 43

Continued from page 42

the committee, declined to comment. An assistant to the MEP said he did not wish to interfere with the internal processes but that he would comment after Tuesday's hearing.

Revelations about the use of the spyware in Spain – both against Catalan independence figures and central government ministers – have proliferated over recent years, prompting concerns over a lack of oversight and security and culminating in the dismissal six months ago of the country's spy chief.

In June 2020, the Guardian and El País reported that at least three senior pro-independence Catalan politicians had been told their phones had been targeted using Pegasus.

At the time, the Spanish government vehemently denied targeting the Catalan independence movement, saying: "This government doesn't spy on its political opponents." The National Intelligence Centre (CNI), however, gave a more guarded answer, saying its work was overseen by Spain's supreme court and it always acted "in full accordance with the legal system, and with absolute respect for the applicable laws".

A report this year from Citizen Lab alleged at least 63 people connected with the Catalan independence movement – including the current regional president, Pere Aragonès – were targeted or infected with Pegasus. The report said lawyers, journalists and civil society activists were also targeted, and that almost all the incidents took place between 2017 and 2020.

It also emerged that the phones of three of Spain's most senior politicians – the prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, the defence minister, Margarita Robles, and the interior minister, Fernando Grande-Marlaska – were in 2021 subjected to "illicit" and "external" targeting using Pegasus.

Paz Esteban, the head of the CNI, reportedly confirmed to a congressional committee that the centre had spied on 18 members of the Catalan independence movement, including Aragonès, with judicial approval. She was sacked shortly afterwards.

Ron Deibert, the founder and head of the Citizen Lab, said in a statement to the Guardian that the committee's work was "crucial to shed light on abuses around the mercenary spyware market".

He added: "We respect the committee and its critical mission. Culpable governments, and their allies, may have a vested interest in ensuring those proceedings do not succeed. That is why it is so essential that the expert witnesses called to testify be uniformly credible. Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the case for this hearing."

The Spanish government did not respond to requests for comment.

Rory McIlroy believes he gave Tiger Woods Covid in run-up to the Open

Guardian sport

▲ *Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy during a practice round prior to this year's Open. Photograph: Kevin C Cox/Getty Images*

Rory McIlroy believes he gave Tiger Woods Covid as the two prepared for his year's Open.

McIlroy says he and Woods had been playing at the the JP McManus Pro-Am in Ireland in the run-up to the Open when he started to feel symptoms.

"I said to [my wife'] Erica, 'I'm feeling a bit weird. I'm just going upstairs to lie down for a bit.' I slept for maybe two hours and the sweat was just pouring off me, then Erica took my temperature and it was sky high," McIlroy told Ireland's Sunday Independent. "I rang Tiger: 'I'm not feeling so good here.' And he goes, 'Oh, I feel OK.' But he texted me at 10 o'clock that night, chills, fever, and I'm like, 'Fucking hell, I've just given Tiger Covid! This is horrendous!' So we both had Covid going into The Open."

The world No 1 did not say in the interview whether he had tested positive for Covid during the Open but he experienced symptoms, such as a loss of taste.

"On Tuesday night I went to the Champions Dinner and it was lovely," he said. "I was sitting there drinking water and they poured a glass of wine, a lovely 2005 Bordeaux, and I was like, 'Ahh, I'll just have a little sip,' but I couldn't taste it. The whole week of the Open I didn't have any taste, and everything smelled like vinegar to me. Everything. It was really strange."

McIlroy entered the final round of the Open in first place, but was overtaken by eventual champion Cameron Smith and runner-up Cameron Young to finish in third place. He did not say in Sunday's interview whether he believed the virus took its toll as the tournament reached its conclusion.

"I got beaten by a better player this week. It's not life or death," McIlroy said at the time. "The putter just went a little cold."

Woods, still feeling the effects of a serious car crash in February 2021, missed the cut.

On Monday, Woods said he will not play at this week's Hero World Challenge after developing plantar fasciitis. He still intends to compete in the PNC Championship alongside his son, Charlie.

Bloody history brings flashpoint to key Iran v USA World Cup clash

Paul MacInnes in Doha

▲ *Gregg Berhalter faces the media in Doha. Photograph: Tim Nwachukwu/Getty Images*

"I'm not well versed on international politics. I'm a football coach," said Gregg Berhalter, but he was a man who had just been exposed to politics in the raw. Twenty-four hours before his side's definitive Group B fixture against Iran, the USA head coach had been hit by a fusillade of hostile questioning from Iranian media. Everything from censorship to American racism and the presence of the US fleet in the Gulf was thrown at him. It was an experience he will never have had before and few coaches will encounter.

It was not entirely unpredictable, however. The complicated and bloody history that exists between Iran and the USA has led to simple sporting encounters between the two nations becoming diplomatic flashpoints. It was the case when the countries first faced each other at the World Cup during France 98 and, in a different way, it has happened again now.

The immediate occasion for tension is the current uprising in Iran. After the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old arrested for failing to properly wear the hijab, protests have spread across the country. More than 450 people have since been killed, according to the advocacy group Human Rights Activists, and more than 18,000 arrested. The protests have followed the men's side to Qatar, where the team refused to sing the national anthem before their match against England. Supporters have also brought banners and T-shirts bearing Amini's name into stadiums, often having them confiscated by security in a country that is an ally of the Iranian state.

The US government has publicly sided with those revolting against the authorities. The secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said Amini "should be alive today" and called on the Iranian government to "end its systemic persecution of women and to allow peaceful protest". The USA team had stayed out of it, however, until on Saturday night the US Soccer Federation altered the banners on its social media accounts to show the standings in Group B, only with an Iranian flag without the symbol of the Islamic Republic.

The men's team and their staff insist they had no knowledge of this stunt and, on Monday, Berhalter apologised for it. But to judge by the stream of agitated questioning from Iranian journalists it had provided an opportunity to deflect criticism away from the Iranian authorities and on to a more traditional enemy.

The history of American (and British) involvement in Iran in the 20th century is shameful and entwined with the pursuit of oil. In conjunction with the British, the US provoked a coup that deposed the democratically elected leader of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1953. They subsequently reimposed royal rule under the Shah, Mohammad Reza, and propped up his corrupt regime, retaining control of the oil fields at the same time as switching political allegiance to regional rival Saudi Arabia. After the Islamic Revolution of 1978-79, the religious leadership became an enemy for successive US presidents and the US provided funding to Saddam Hussein throughout the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war. More recently, attempts at resetting relations between the US and Iran were reversed by Donald Trump. There is a reason they are known as the Great Satan.

▲ *Iranian forward Ali Daei fights for the ball with USA midfielder Cobi Jones during the 1998 World Cup. Photograph: Gerard Malie/AFP/Getty Images*

Continued on page 44

Continued *from page 43*

This is what Berhalter walked into in Doha and while it is possible that he ought to have been better briefed as to the context of this fixture, it is also true he has experience of football rising above the tensions between these two countries. That match in Lyon in 1998 was billed “the mother of all games”. An unprecedented security presence was put in place to limit the risk of pitch invaders or violent protest. Iranian players were told not to approach their American opponents to shake their hands, as Fifa protocol dictated. Tension ran high.

And yet a compromise was found. The Iranians instead handed the Americans flowers, the atmosphere in the ground remained voluble but calm. Iran won 2-1 but mutual respect was earned and a rematch arranged for the following year on American soil, itself a diplomatic achievement. “We did more in 90 minutes than the politicians did in 20 years,” the USA midfielder Jeff Agoos said.

Berhalter was watching on that day in Lyon, his “first and only game” as a TV pundit, he revealed at his press conference. He responded to the Iranian barrage of questions with humility and honesty, his captain Tyler Adams likewise. But Berhalter’s takeaway from the 1998 fixture was not about geopolitics but sport. He saw in the Iran team a quality he wishes for his own players at Al Thumama stadium on Tuesday.

“That game sticks in my mind, it burns in my mind,” he said. “There was one team that really wanted to win the game that day and one that didn’t. For us to have a chance to advance in this World Cup, we are going to have to play like they did.”

‘I’m glad light is being shone on human rights’: USA fans on the Qatar World Cup

Bryan Armen Graham in Doha

▲ *US fans cheer on their team against England. Photograph: Katelyn Mulcahy/FIFA/Getty Images*

The myriad controversies that have come to dwarf the Qatar World Cup have not kept American fans from turning out in droves, filling bustling public spaces like the Doha corniche and the Souq Wahif clad in USA shirts and stars-and-stripes-patterned regalia.

While Fifa has not specified how many tickets it sold directly to US supporters, it has confirmed the United States ranked third in tickets sold by country of residence behind Qatar and Saudi Arabia and ahead of Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates.

Even as a number of American fans on the ground have expressed concern over the host country’s human rights abuses with respect to migrant laborers, women and the LGBTQ community, the environmental costs of hosting the tournament in the region as well as the persistent allegations of bribery between the Qatar bid committee and Fifa executives, the allure of the World Cup remains as strong as ever with a robust US travelling contingent that belies the sport’s modest popularity back home.

Denise Kiernan, an author from Asheville, North Carolina, said that she was grateful for the World Cup’s ability to call attention to Qatar’s dismal human rights record, but hopes the global media will keep its focus on the issues here once the tournament is over.

“I am always bothered by human rights violations wherever they occur,” Kiernan said. “It did not prevent me from coming to this tournament. I am glad a light is being shone on them. What I am very curious to see is whether or not people who have been following the stories of the treatment of migrant workers, for example – whether or not their families were properly reimbursed for deaths and injuries, whether or not people are paid – I want to see whether or not those stories are followed three months, six months, nine months, a year out, to make sure that those issues are resolved. What would bother me is if they were not.”

Erin Blankenship, the co-founder of Equal Playing Field, a non-profit initiative dedicated to challenge gender inequality in sport, grew up in California but lives in Cairo. She was bothered by the off-field issues but didn’t hesitate to travel to Qatar for her sixth World Cup, which she gives a mixed review compared to previous editions.

“The Qataris did what the Qatari do very well, right?” Blankenship said. “They invest in infrastructure and that’s what they’ve really focused on as part of their legacy components. I think the prices are pretty outrageous, but it was all part of what I expected.

“There’s a lot of really irrational components, even the basic security protocols that are very annoying. The fact that they draw you out in these long snakey lines with single points of entry and exit to a stadium for 50,000 people. It’s a control thing. I get that, but it doesn’t make sense for the fan experience. That’s a bit frustrating, but otherwise I think it’s been pretty enjoyable.”

An almost universal gripe among US fans has been the last-minute ban of beer sales in match areas and in fan zones only two days before the tournament in a stunning reversal.

Marcus Brown, a Brooklyn native attending his first World Cup and wearing a Clint Dempsey shirt at Sunday night’s match between Croatia and Canada, was “not happy” when he learned that beer would be outlawed from inside and around the perimeter of the stadiums. But he said that coming across alcohol has been surprisingly easy thanks to the efforts of a US fan known as Map Man, whose meticulously sourced catalog of the various hotels and restaurants where beer and liquor are sold has been viewed more than 700,000 times, making him a minor cult hero at the tournament.

“To make the decision to cut off beer two days before the tournament makes it feel like a bait-and-switch from the Qatari government,” Brown said. “They waited till everybody was here before they announced a decision they probably made up their mind about months or years ago. It’s been easy enough to find a drink as long as you’re willing to pay $20 for a beer, but it would have been nice to have one or two at the stadiums before the game.”

For Kiernan, other concerns around the first World Cup to be staged in a conservative Muslim nation, including the criminalization of homosexuality in Qatar, have not been a problem as she’s made her way around the city and surrounding stadiums.

“Everyone has been incredibly nice and helpful,” she said. “I have had zero problems. I have spent time with various cultures. I have spent time out and about in the city and in the stadiums with gay men. Nothing has been raised or been an issue. I am not saying that doesn’t mean things haven’t happened, but as far as my experiences, it’s been very easy.”

But for now, the attention has turned to Tuesday’s match against Iran at the Al Thumama Stadium, where the United States must win to keep their tournament alive and progress to the knockout stage.

“I think we were the better team on the pitch [against England], but we didn’t finish,” Kiernan said. “It’s a young team that plays off each other in interesting ways. I put our fitness, our physicality and our focus up against anyone’s. I want to see them go all the way.”

Iran’s Queiroz hits back in flag row by highlighting school shootings in USA

Paul MacInnes in Doha

▲ *‘If you talk human rights, racism, kids dying at schools from shooting, we have solidarity with all humanitarian causes,’ Carlos Queiroz said. Photograph: Georgi Licovski/*

Carlos Queiroz has raised the temperature before Iran’s crucial Group B fixture with the USA, addressing criticism of the Iranian regime by drawing parallels with American school shootings.

The Iran coach made his latest controversial intervention during this World Cup in relation to a row over a tweet by the US Soccer Federation which appeared to have deliberately doctored the Iranian flag. It came little more than 24 hours after Queiroz called for Jürgen Klinsmann to resign from a Fifa committee over remarks about the “culture” of Iran’s team.

Speaking at his pre-match press conference, the 69-year-old year old took great pains to praise the US team and their performances in Qatar. He also highlighted his own role in the development of the game in the States in the 90s. Asked about the USA’s social media post, which removed the symbol of the Islamic Republic from the flag and led Iran to call for the US to be banned from the World Cup, Queiroz took quiet aim at social problems in the US.

“We have said many times that we have solidarity of all humanitarian causes,” Queiroz said. “But we have solidarity with causes all over the world whoever they are. If you talk human rights, racism, kids dying at schools from shooting, we have solidarity with all. But we bring a smile for 90 minutes, that is our mission.”

Protests in Iran since Mahsa Amini died in hospital while in police custody have seen at least 450 people killed, and more than 18,000 arrested, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, an advocacy group following the demonstrations.

The USA coach, Gregg Berhalter, apologised for the tweet of the flag. “I can only reiterate that the players and staff knew nothing about what was being posted sometimes things are out of our control,” he said. “We’re not focused on those outside things, all we can do is apologise on the part of the players and the staff.”

Queiroz was asked about his lengthy tirade against Klinsmann, after the German had said the “culture” of the team was to look to pressurise the referee into giving fouls, but the manager

Continued *on page 45*

Continued from page 44

said he had "no comment" to make. However went on to defend his team and what he called their "values and principles".

"I always work and always believe in my life that a football team must be based on the work ethics and principles of what a team is. [I want] to create a code of conduct that can make players believe every single morning they wake up that they need to be better, to beat what they were the day before. The only thing I care to talk about is the team as a unit, cohesion and being as a family."

Naivety cost John Herdman and Canada dear in the World Cup's Group of Eff

Joe Callaghan in Doha

The softly spoken Fifa translator paused for a moment. But she held her nerve. "In the end," she said as she relayed man-of-the-match Andrej Kramaric's words, "Croatia demonstrated who eff'd whom."

Sunday night at the Khalifa Stadium was a cruel, chastening one for Canada. The ignominy didn't end at the final whistle. Kramaric, whose two goals came in an emphatic 4-1 Canadian defeat, was joined by his manager Zlatko Dalic at the post-match top table where the final words, no matter which language you translate them into, were all Croatian.

The defeat meant Canada were the second team eliminated from Qatar 2022 but, technically, the first sent home, seeing as the pitiful hosts already are home. From the most moral victory in defeat to Belgium and then those fateful fighting words on Wednesday to it all being over by Sunday, it was a hell of comedown.

What part did Herdman's "Eff Croatia" comments play in it all? Enough. Enough of a part for them to account for at least 20%, maybe 25%, of the combined questions from the floor after the Croatia game. But zoom out and look at the four days as a whole and there is, if not a pattern, then a patch. A sticky patch of naivety off and then on the field that brought Canada's return to

John Herdman and his team pay tribute to Canada fans after their loss to Croatia. Photograph: Dean Mouhtaropoulos/Getty Images

the men's World Cup to such a screeching halt.

As largely harmless as they were, Herdman's words did not help Canada. Why? Because they clearly helped Croatia. And the 2018 World Cup finalists, already operating on a higher plane than Concacaf's top qualifiers, definitely didn't need a leg up. Of all the teams to provide some bulletin-board motivation to, a gnarled veteran Croatian core coming off a dispiriting opening stalemate with Morocco is not one of them. Even to observe Kramaric and Dalic without the help of a translator told you as much. It was written on their faces.

Herdman said he didn't regret his words and then intimated that he did. He was processing it all in real time and, as Wednesday had taught him, that can be risky.

"No, not at all," he replied when asked if he wished he hadn't used the f-word. "As I keep saying, we're here to push as far as we can. We're here to change the mentality of the group. I could have been a bit more composed coming out of the huddle. That's my learning. I'll take that on the chin."

If the comments and the ensuing Croatian tabloid mockery had helped turn an already chaotic Group F into Group Eff, it was Herdman's job to get it all back on an even keel. That was something Canada never had Sunday at Khalifa Stadium. They roared out of the gates and Alphonso Davies created personal and national history with the fastest goal of this World Cup and the Canadian men's first in any edition. For the next 20 minutes they searched for a second. But they never settled. So Croatia did. And naivety cost Herdman, and Canada, a second time.

Captain Atiba Hutchison is beloved, an older brother to the other 25 players here. He was winning his 100th cap a couple of months before his 40th birthday. But as Luka Modric, Mateo Kovacic and Marcelo Brozovic got a grip and then ran rampant through the middle, Hutchinson was bypassed and bullied. Porto's Stephen Eustaquio was hobbled by injury but inexplicably both were left in to flail and inevitably Croatia turned it all around.

Hutchinson was partially or prominently at fault for three Croatian goals yet Herdman argued that his captain was "next level" before admitting soon after that he could have made changes sooner.

"I think there are small margins," he said. "For me it's trying to get those tactical shifts in earlier. In that first half there was a moment where Modric and Brozovic had started to pick apart our midfield two and we needed a tactical shift a little bit quicker and maybe needed the subs a bit quicker. It might have made the difference. I've got to reflect. I'm a bit raw at the moment."

When he did belatedly make the changes, Herdman brought in rising star Ismaël Koné and veteran Jonathan Osorio. A decade separates the two players but what ties them is that

Atiba Hutchinson is a beloved figure in Canadian football. Photograph: Antonin Thuillier/AFP/Getty Images

neither has ever played outside MLS. And here they were being sent into the white heat of a decisive World Cup game to tame a Croatian midfield built from Real Madrid, Chelsea and Internazionale. It's the kind of moment to pause and realise how far Canada have come – and how far they still have to go.

In that wider context, Herdman was of course right to say he was "proud of what they achieved … we came here to make history." Davies' storming header was historic, an instant Canadian heritage moment. But zoom in again and it counted for little.

The team weren't tipped by many to make it out of a group that was expected – and has proven to be – one of the least predictable and most competitive here. But for it to all be over before the final group game stings. Herdman will regroup for Morocco on Thursday and hope his side can have a say in how the group shakes out. But not too loud of a say. That lesson has been learned.

What's better than 2.8in per play on offense? For the Jets, almost anything

Dave Caldwell

New York Jets coach Robert Saleh sounded as if he did not want to make too big of a deal of the nice things he saw Sunday from Mike White, the quarterback whom Saleh tapped last week to step in for the struggling Zach Wilson, who was drafted last year to be the team's latest savior.

At one point in his postgame news conference, Saleh said of White: "He'll make good decisions with the football, and he'll make them quick." Then he added: "Just my take on it."

Of course, others in the franchise will have a take on what White meant to the Jets in their impressive 31-10 victory over the Chicago Bears. He passed for 315 yards and three touchdowns in the win, which pushed the Jets' record to 7-4 and kept them in the race for a playoff spot.

Others in the franchise will have a take on what to do about Wilson, who threw four touchdown passes (with five interceptions) in seven games –

Mike White threw for three touchdowns during the Jets' victory over the Chicago Bears. Photograph: Vincent Carchietta/USA Today Sports

including a wretched 10-3 loss on 20 November to the New England Patriots, in which the Jets gained two yards (or 2.8 inches per play) in the second half.

Wilson is the second quarterback whom the Jets picked in the top five of the draft in the last four years; the first, Sam Darnold, was not so hot, either, and was traded to Carolina. (Darnold stepped in Sunday and did well in the Panthers' 23-10 victory over Denver.)

Saleh said last week that Wilson would benefit from taking a step back so he could refocus. But what if White is the answer for the Jets – or at least a better answer than Wilson? The 27-year-old White, who played at Western Kentucky and was drafted in the fifth round by the Dallas Cowboys in 2018, was so accurate Sunday that Saleh will look silly if he benches him.

And so the Jets find themselves in the middle of a budding and genuine New York Quarterback Controversy. It would have been a lot worse had White stank Sunday, but White has emerged, even though Wilson had the pedigree coming out of Brigham Young.

White drove the Jets 75 yards on nine plays for a touchdown on their first possession against the Bears, throwing the first of two touchdown passes Sunday to Garrett Wilson. By halftime, the Jets had a 17-10 lead, and White had 235 yards passing and two touchdowns.

Later in the game, Jets fans started a "Mike White!" chant – which White said he probably would have appreciated more had he not been so focused on calling out the signals. He started three games while Wilson was hurt last year, beating the Supe Bowl-bound Bengals.

The Jets essentially needed White to keep things under control while their running game hammered out yards, and their stellar defense suffocated opponents. The Jets gained 158 yards

Josh Jacobs celebrates his game-winning touchdown on Sunday. Photograph: Joe Nicholson/USA Today Sports

rushing and held the Justin Fields-less Bears at bay, but White was the star.

After announcing Wilson's benching last week, Saleh claimed, "Zach's career here is not over," adding that he fully intended to get him back on the field this season. But the Jets have a genuine chance to make the playoffs for the first time since 2010.

Coaches tend to roll with the hot QB, or they find themselves out of a job. So Wilson should stay on the bench, at least for now. Moreover, Saleh said of White: "I don't think there's a guy in that locker room who didn't think he'd

Continued on page 46

Continued *from page 45*

be able to perform that way today."

The Vikings are the opponents next week, followed by the Buffalo Bills. It is hard to see Wilson returning soon, given the Jets are finally playing for something in December. Whether he will be another busted high Jets' draft pick can be decided much later.

MVP of the week

Josh Jacobs, running back, Las Vegas Raiders. Jacobs set a franchise record Sunday by rushing for 229 yards, the last 86 of which came on a Bo Jackson-like touchdown bolt through the middle of the Seattle defense that won the game in overtime, 40-34. Jacobs, in his fourth NFL season, had previously never had a touchdown run longer than 28 yards.

Jacobs scored two touchdowns and also caught six passes for 74 yards to finish with 303 yards, the seventh-most in an NFL game in the Super Bowl era. Las Vegas (4-7), who have won two straight, tied the game with less than two minutes in regulation on a five-yard touchdown pass from Derek Carr to Foster Moreau. Jacobs may well have helped save Josh McDaniels' job.

Video of the week

With great pomp, the Washington Commanders pulled back a red curtain to unveil a memorial Sunday to Sean Taylor, the superb safety who was killed in a home invasion 15 years ago. The Commanders never promised a marble or even bronze statue of Taylor, but what was uncovered at the ceremony looked … a lot like a mannequin.

Dan Snyder's franchise had botched yet another public-relations opportunity.

"I get this wasn't supposed to be a statue, but this looks like a display you'd see in a Nike store," the writer Jemele Hill tweeted. "Nothing memorable about it. Looks like no thought or care was put into preserving the legacy of one of their most impactful and beloved players."

Even worse, the team forgot the 40 or 50 thin strips of tape Taylor wrapped around his facemask to make him look even more ferocious. Will Blackmon, a retired defensive back who played the last two seasons of his 10-year NFL career in Washington, pointed out on Twitter that the glass-encased memorial to Taylor had a Nike jersey, Reebok pants and Adidas shoes.

"Looks like a last-minute project to me," Blackmon tweeted.

Stat of the week

5-0. That's Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa's record since he returned from a frightening concussion sustained in a September loss to Cincinnati that had a lot of people fearing for his future. On Sunday, he ran his record as a starter to 8-1 this year by throwing for 299 yards and a touchdown in a 30-15 victory over the hapless Houston Texans. His QBR rating of 82.5 this season is the fifth-best since the rankings began in 2006, behind only Tom Brady (2007), Peyton Manning (2006), Aaron Rodgers (2011) and Lamar Jackson (2019).

Quote of the week

"This is the kind of game that great teams win" – Cincinnati quarterback Joe Burrow after the Bengals beat the Tennessee Titans, 20-16.

The Bengals, a Super Bowl team last year, are only 7-4 and not exactly a great team at the moment, but they beat the Titans without running back Joe Mixon (concussion) and Ja'Marr Chase (hip). Cincinnati started 2-3, but Sunday's victory was their third straight and their fifth in the last six games. They are tied with the Baltimore Ravens for first place in the AFC North.

Elsewhere around the league

-- Much has been made of the San Francisco 49ers offense, with Jimmy Garoppolo having weapons such as Christian McCaffrey, Deebo Samuel and George Kittle at his disposal. But on Sunday their defense shut out New Orleans in a 13-0 win, the first time the Saints have failed to score in nearly 21 years. The Niners have now won four straight, are top of the NFC West at 7-4 and are coming into form as the playoffs heave into view.

-- Aaron Rodgers left Green Bay's 40-33 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles with an oblique injury in a game that saw the Packers' playoff hopes all but disappear. The good news for Green Bay? His replacement, Jordan Love, looked a much better player than he has in previous seasons, showing impressive arm strength and accuracy. He threw a touchdown on his first drive and then led Green Bay to a field-goal on the second. Jalen Hurts was brilliant (again), by the way. He threw two touchdowns and ran for 157 yards as Philly moved to 10-1.

-- Sean McVay, the coach of a Los Angeles Rams team that won the Super Bowl less than 10 months ago, took two on the chin, one literally and one figuratively, in a 26-10 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs that dropped the Rams to 3-8. The Rams' Matthew Stafford missed the big QB matchup against Patrick Mahomes with a concussion – forcing McVay to use third-teamer Bryce Perkins, who threw for a mere 100 yards.

While walking down the sidelines early in the game, McVay was clobbered on the chin by Roger Carter Jr as he ran onto the field. Clearly stunned, McVay opted to stay on the sideline, rubbing his jaw.

-- One thing that Tom Brady has never done in his NFL career is to lead a team with a losing record into the playoffs. This could be that year. His Tampa Bay Buccaneers slumped to 5-6 after a 23-17 overtime loss in the rain to the Cleveland Browns, but the Bucs remained in first place in the awful NFC South because the Atlanta Falcons (5-7) blew it against Washington. Marcus Mariota was marching the Falcons to what would have been a stirring victory, but his tipped pass on second-and-goal from the Washington four-yard line was intercepted by the Commanders with 58 seconds to go. Aided by a careless running-into-the-punter penalty, Washington, in last place in the NFC East at 7-5, ran out the clock on a 19-13 victory.

-- The mascot for the Jacksonville Jaguars is a cat figure by the name of Jaxson DeVille. Like most sports mascots, he has one of those big furry fake heads and wears a version of the team's uniform. Well, Sunday was different. The temperature spiked after thunderstorms in Jacksonville, and he wore his head and shoes – and just a Speedo with stars and stripes. He caused an online stir, immediately labeled as a "Full Florida Man," who "has no shame." Rodger Sherman of the Ringer pointed out on Twitter, "The fact that Jaguars mascot Jaxson De Ville still feels the need to wear underwear when otherwise nude implies that he has genitalia which must be covered in public." And the Jaguars won the game on a last-minute two-point conversion as Trevor Lawrence enjoyed maybe his best game in the NFL. The tactic must have been catching – later on Sunday, the Los Angeles Chargers opted to go for two in the final seconds instead of settling for overtime as they beat the Arizona Cardinals 25-24.

Casemiro stunner ends Switzerland resistance to fire Brazil into last 16

Louise Taylor at Stadium 974

Brazil limbered up for the match by taking a stroll around Doha's Souq Waqif. They emerged unscathed, with wallets still largely intact, but Switzerland proved nowhere near as generous as Qatar's market traders and, for a long time here, threatened to rob Tite's team of their cloak of invincibility.

Ultimately Casemiro's glorious 83rd-minute half-volley, dispatched with the outside of his right foot, propelled the pre-tournament favourites into the knockout stages but much of the action emphasised precisely why all the pre-match focus had centred on a man who was never going to appear on the pitch.

▲ *Casemiro arrows his half-volley into the net to secure victory for Brazil. Photograph: Matthias Hangst/Getty Images*

Neymar divides opinion in Brazil – and not just because of his far right-leaning politics or sizeable ego – but a well-drilled Switzerland provided ample evidence of his importance. It is no exaggeration to say his ankle injury-induced absence was keenly felt.

Brazil's manager initially compensated for the loss of his attacking talisman by advancing Lucas Paquetá into the front three from midfield, with Fred joining his Manchester United colleague Casemiro further back. It is not too harsh to say Fred's impact was peripheral. "Switzerland have the best defence," Tite said. "And we do miss Neymar."

Murat Yakin's Switzerland arrived at Stadium 974 slightly late after being involved in a minor road accident en route. It seems the driver of their team bus allowed his mind to wander as traffic near the ground slowed to a crawl and ended up crashing into the back of the police escort car in front. That collision in turn left the vehicle travelling immediately behind the coach unable to brake in time before adding to the pile-up.

Mercifully no one was hurt and, to Brazil's dismay, Switzerland's superbly sustained concentration contrasted markedly with that of their driver. The tone was set when the right-back, Silvan Widmer, swiftly, and unceremoniously, halted a rather offended-looking Vinícius Júnior in his tracks. Such no-frills Swiss interruptions would prove a theme.

Although there were some gorgeous cameos of sharp, slick, imaginative and sometimes gloriously improvisational one- and two-touch football from Brazil, their final ball lacked incision against deep-sitting opponents. Yakin's well-structured, efficiently organised team had been set up to play on the counter-attack and, when Casemiro caught the accelerating Breel Embolo, late from behind, he was fortunate to escape a booking.

With every passing minute Neymar's value to Brazil seemed incrementally enhanced. Significantly almost half an hour had passed before Yann Sommer made a save.

When, courtesy of Raphinha's left-footed, right-wing cross that opening finally arrived, Switzerland's goalkeeper proved equal to the challenge, parrying a slightly scuffed half-volley from the unmarked Vinícius Júnior.

It was Brazil's first shot on target – a statistic reflecting their struggles to translate possession into actual chances.. Sommer cannot have expected to have had so little involvement. Was history about to repeat itself and were two countries who had drawn both of their previous World Cup meetings – in 1950 and 2018 – poised to complete a statistical trilogy?

Paquetá did not re-emerge for the second period, having been replaced by Real Madrid's Rodrygo, a forward many Brazil fans believed should have deputised for Neymar in the first place. Before the soon to be influential Rodrygo had time to get going, though, Switzerland nearly scored when Widmer's cross resulted in Vinícius Júnior blocking Djibril Sow's goal-bound shot.

The moment for change had arrived and Tite duly altered his midfield, replacing Fred with Newcastle's Bruno Guimarães whose passing and movement immediately began lifting the overwhelmingly yellow-shirted, Brazil-supporting audience's mood and asking Switzerland questions they could not always answer.

It was a pass from Guimarães – albeit slightly overhit – that initiated the sequence of events which led to Vinícius Júnior receiving Casemiro's pass, riding Nico Elvedi's challenge and squeezing the ball just inside a post with Sommer beaten.

Brazil's entire bench raced to the touchline to celebrate but a VAR review spoilt the party after detecting that Richarlison, who played Casemiro in, had been offside. After proving integral to the defeat of Serbia last week, Richarlison found himself shunted to the margins by a Swiss backline offered further protection by Granit Xhaka's reassuring central midfield presence.

Yet, as the game wore on, Brazil increasingly stretched Yakin's defensive elastic. It finally snapped when Casemiro met Rodrygo's pass and applied his right boot to the ball and sent a half-volley swerving into the net leaving a wrong-footed, static, Sommer – possibly deceived by the gentlest of deflections off Manuel Akanji – helpless.

▲ *Brazil celebrate opening the scoring late on against Switzerland. Photograph: Bagu Blanco/Pressinphoto/Shutterstock*

By the final whistle Switzerland had mustered just six shots, and none on target. Alisson had not been required to make a single save. Was Yakin right to drop Xherdan Shaqiri, so often his creative catalyst? It would be no surprise to see the winger return in the final group game against Serbia as his side aim to join Brazil, and it is hoped, Neymar in the last 16.

As Tite's sometimes unsung midfield anchor, Casemiro is known as the invisible man but at the end of a long, hard night on the edge of the Arabian Sea he finally compensated for the absence of the man who was not there.

"Casemiro is the surprise element," Brazil's exultant manager said. "He infiltrates from the back. Neymar has big creative power but other players are getting there."

Kudus doubles up to edge Ghana past South Korea in World Cup thriller

Nick Ames at Education City Stadium

Ghana's task is now clear: cast aside the spectre of Luis Suárez, bury the ghosts of Soccer City and earn a place in the knockout stage. Their future in this tournament comes down to a cup final in miniature against Uruguay and perhaps fate had decided that at the moment Group H was drawn. If they win they will progress for the first time since 2010, when *La Celeste* denied them a place in the semi-finals with a helping hand that reverberates through World Cup lore.

That opportunity awaits because, against a largely excellent South Korea team, they were on top when the music stopped. This was a pulsating, thrilling game and Ghana were fortunate to win. Without Mohammed Kudus they would not have done so but the Ajax winger, who had been hotly tipped to enthral in Qatar, did not disappoint. The second of his two goals was coolly taken and rendered a whirlwind comeback from their opponents fruitless.

It meant they can now reckon with history although their manager, Otto Addo, played down any notion revenge would be a motivation when they face Suárez and company. "It was a really, really long time ago when this incident

▲ *Mohammed Kudus celebrates passionately in front of the TV cameras after scoring the winning goal for Ghana. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

happened," he said. "I'm a strong believer that if you don't seek too much revenge sometimes you get more blessings."

In truth he was already counting them. Addo was gracious enough to admit his team were "a little bit lucky" and nobody could argue. His goalkeeper, Lawrence Ati-Zigi, denied Cho Gue-sung a hat-trick in injury time and a largely dominant South Korea could point to several more near misses. Paulo Bento's side also felt frustrated when the referee, Anthony Taylor, blew for full-time as they prepared to take a corner. Taylor was perfectly within his rights but a furious Bento disagreed, running on to the pitch and receiving a red card for his protests.

While Bento cooled off, his assistant Sérgio Costa articulated their sense of injustice. "The result is totally unfair, not even a draw would have been fair," he said. "We clearly deserved to win so I think we can feel very proud of what we've done. You can count on us for the next match." That will be against Portugal and failure to win would guarantee their exit.

On the evidence of this performance a shock is not entirely far-fetched. South Korea had attacked Ghana in waves for 24 minutes, winning seven corners and benefitting from Son Heung-min's increased comfort wearing a mask, but fell behind out of the blue. A Jordan Ayew free-kick was defended scrappily and Mohammed Salisu, the Southampton defender, reacted to score from close range.

In hindsight the ensuing spell was decisive. Ghana turned the screw and were allowed to enjoy themselves until half-time. They doubled their lead when Kudus, timing his run cleverly, met another Jordan Ayew cross from open play and glanced past Kim Seung-gyu. Having struggled to match South Korea for pace and verve, the Black Stars were in control.

But this was several matches in one and, shortly after the hour, things had turned on their head. Cho had offered a warning with a header repelled by Ati-Zigi but went one better when converting a centre by the substitute Lee Kang-in, who had dispossessed Tariq Lamptey. Three minutes later he flung himself at a delivery from Kim Jin-su, contriving a finish of stunning hunger and power.

"We really couldn't get the crosses under control," Addo said. At that point only one side seemed likely to win. When Kudus, sweeping a low first-time shot into the bottom corner after Iñaki Williams had air-kicked Gideon Mensah's cutback, quickly restored the

▲ *Cho Gue-sung heads his and South Korea's second goal. Photograph: Lee Jin-*

lead it was not the first time analysis had been confounded.

"On and off the pitch he's an extraordinary guy, a great character," Addo said of Kudus. "He's fast and intelligent. He has to work more defensively but he's on the right track to be a great player."

Ati-Zigi saved a Lee free-kick and watched as Salisu cleared off the line from Kim Jin-su, but Ghana rode out another storm. "We gave our souls on the pitch," said Costa, and South Korea appeared desolate at the end. Son was among those seemingly in tears; feet were gazed at and faces covered upon walking off but it would be as well to remember another showing of this standard could bring greater reward.

"It's a normal reaction from someone who did all they could to win," Costa said. It is Ghana, though, who can see the path to redemption they have craved.

Why are World Cup players wearing strange face masks on the pitch?

Samantha Lock

They have raised comparisons to Hannibal Lecter and the Phantom of the Opera, but the strange face masks popping up on World Cup pitches in Qatar are not fashion statements but hi-tech protective devices.

The masks are made from materials like polycarbonate and protect athletes who have sustained facial injuries, ensuring they can play on without risking further damage. Some are 3D printed to exactly fit a scan of the contours of each athlete's face.

Croatian football's golden boy Joško Gvardiol, 20, wore a distinctive black face mask during last week's Group F showdown against Morocco and again on Sunday against Canada.

▲ *Joško Gvardiol of Croatia wearing a face mask to protect his broken nose during a FIFA World Cup 2022 match in Qatar. Photograph: Kieran McManus/REX/Shutterstock*

The RB Leipzig centre-back left the field after a collision with teammate Willi Orban in a match earlier this month, with scans later showing he had broken his nose and suffered minor injuries to his face and eyes. Gvardiol decided to wear the mask to protect himself from further damage.

A similar on-field collision left South Korea's Son Heung-min, 30, with a fractured eye socket during a 1 November Champions League win. The Tottenham Hotspur star collided with Marseille defender Chancel Mbemba's shoulder, prompting his immediate departure from the field.

Son now sports a black carbon fibre mask, which he described as "more comfortable than I thought. It's made of good material. It's light, hard when worn on the face, and it's a good material that can protect against impact. I was surprised that it was considerably lighter than I thought."

Iran's goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand, 30, also masked up after sustaining a facial injury against England.

▲ *Joško Gvardiol of Croatia during the win over Canada on Sunday. Photograph: Pixsell/MB Media/Getty Images*

Beiranvand dramatically clashed heads with teammate Majid Hosseini in their 6-2 defeat.

Tunisia's Ellyes Skhiri, 27, sported a mask when facing Denmark and Australia in Group D clashes. The FC Köln midfielder is nursing a broken cheekbone after suffering an injury in late October.

GWS Giants' No 1 AFL draft pick Aaron Cadman happy with move north

Australian Associated Press

No 1 draft pick Aaron Cadman is excited by the prospect of starting his AFL career interstate after being selected as the nation's top young talent by Greater Western Sydney. The Victorian key forward was, as expected, picked first when the Giants opted not to bid on highly rated father-son prospect Will Ashcroft. The Brisbane Lions matched North Melbourne's bid to land midfield gun Ashcroft at pick two.

GWS secured the prized first selection in the "mega trade" involving former No 1 pick Jason Horne-Francis last month and there was no surprise when they used it on Cadman. Unlike some other top prospects, the 18-year-old GWV Rebels product has indicated he is fully prepared to move north. That commitment was attractive to the Giants, who have lost a host of stars back to their home states in recent years.

"It's really exciting. I think it will do good things for me and I like the idea

Continued *on page 48*

Continued from page 47

of a re-start, experiencing new things and meeting new people," Cadman said. GWS recruiting staff told Cadman last week they had committed to selecting him with the top pick. Only the athletic 195cm forward and his inner circle – his family, manager and junior coach – were in on the secret.

"It's been hard holding it in but it's been well worth it," Cadman said. "[Being selected at No 1] is really special but at the end of the day it's just a title. Obviously there's a bit of pressure added to it, which I don't mind at all. I think I'll turn that into motivation and it will make me a better player … but I'm just here to play footy and do what I do."

Cadman transitioned from a wingman to a key forward during his draft year, leading the NAB League goal-kicking and earning All-Australian selection at the national championships. He has been likened to former GWS goal-kicker Jeremy Cameron, who mentored the teenager this year, and Carlton's Coleman Medal winner Charlie Curnow.

Brisbane were always committed to drafting Ashcroft, the son of club great Marcus Ashcroft. He was joined by fellow father-son pick Jaspa Fletcher – the son of Adrian Fletcher – when the Lions matched the Western Bulldogs' bid at pick 12.

North Melbourne had two high-end selections and took Victorian duo Harry Sheezel and George Wardlaw with picks three and four respectively. Sheezel is set to be the first Jewish player in the AFL in two decades and was subjected to anti-Semitic abuse online during the build-up to the draft. It will be investigated by the AFL.

Essendon rejected rival trade offers for their first pick, No 5 overall, using it to take highly rated midfielder Elijah Tsatas. The 18-year-old is the first Bombers player born since the club last won an AFL final, in 2004. Premiers Geelong used pick eight on local product Jhye Clark, who has been likened to retired flag skipper Joel Selwood, while West Coast selected West Australian pair Reuben Ginbey (nine) and Elijah Hewett (14).

Sydney were denied bids on GWS academy player Harry Rowston (pick 16) and Adelaide father-son prospect Max Michalanney (17), the son of Norwood SANFL great Jim Michalanney. The Swans then accepted a live trade deal to ship pick 18 to Hawthorn, who used it on bolter Josh Weddle. Collingwood used pick 19 on Ed Allan, the son of Hawks premiership player and former Fremantle captain Ben Allan. GWS will have the first pick, No 22 overall, when the draft resumes on Tuesday night.

▲ George Wardlaw, Will Ashcroft, Aaron Cadman, Harry Sheezel and Elijah Tsatas and the top 13 draft selections at Marvel Stadium. Photograph: Daniel Pockett/AFL Photos/Getty Images

Trippier delivers classic saying England struggling with 'fly away' World Cup ball

Jacob Steinberg in Doha

Kieran Trippier has delivered one of the classic World Cup lines: suggesting the quality of set pieces at the Qatar World Cup has suffered because players are struggling to adapt to the ball.

The wait for a side to score a free-kick during the group stage ended when Morocco beat Belgium 2-0 on Sunday and Trippier, who has been taking England's attacking set pieces, has noticed that the balls being used in Qatar are lighter.

"Every time I've crossed the ball I've felt the balls are a bit different but there are no excuses really," the England right-back said.

"I would just say the balls are a bit different, but it is not the heat or anything. I feel it's a bit lighter.

"It feels if you put too much power on it it'll just fly away. But it's one of them where we have to deal with that; all of us do. We train with the same ones. It's a football, isn't it?"

England overhit a lot of set pieces during their draw with the USA last Friday. But Trippier joked that the lack of free-kick goals might simply be down to a lack of skill. "Maybe it is the players," he said.

Trippier said England needed an improved performance when they look to win their group by beating Wales on Tuesday night in the final Group B match. The Newcastle defender refused to get into a war of words with former England players who used their punditry roles to criticise Gareth Southgate's side after the USA game.

"It's opinions and everyone is entitled to them," Trippier said. "We know what we need to do. We know we can go up a few more levels. They're all behind us, they all want us to do well."

▲ Kieran Trippier says the World Cup ball is lighter than he is normally used to. Photograph: Kirill Kudryavtsev/AFP/Getty Images

Gareth Southgate warns against piling pressure on England's Phil Foden

Jacob Steinberg in Doha

Gareth Southgate has cautioned against heaping pressure on Phil Foden and warned it would be a risk to pin England's hopes of winning the World Cup on one player.

Southgate, who does not want to rest Harry Kane against Wales on Tuesday night, was accused of wasting Foden's talent after not using him in England's 0-0 draw with the USA. He has fired back at his critics by insisting he loves the Manchester City player. At the same time the head coach is wary of overhyping the 22-year-old, even though he is considering starting him when his side look to win Group B by beating Wales.

"He's a great option for us in two or three different positions and he will have a big impact in games," Southgate said. "But also we have to be careful because we are putting a lot of pressure on him now. We're a team and we need all of the players and they can all play a part but not any one of them is the reason we will win or lose.

"We need to make sure we are not building Phil into a situation where, if he steps on the pitch, this is becoming really difficult for him because the level of expectation is beyond a young guy who is still establishing himself internationally in a different environment from his club where you're comfortable with all the players you play with. We love him to bits. We also have got to look after him a bit as well."

Foden is expected to play in a wide role if he starts – possibly in place of Bukayo Saka on the right. There is a possibility Southgate switches to a back three if Kyle Walker is included . Foden, who is pushing to get the nod over Jack Grealish for a starting spot, does not play through the middle for City.

"Sometimes the discussion around just plopping him in as a 10 in every game isn't realistic because in a game like the other night you have to have the ball and there are defensive responsibilities that he doesn't have to do at his club," Southgate said. "From the wide area it's different. He's got defensive responsibility but the role is different. In the 10 you have to cover a lot more ground and be a lot more aware of the spaces without the ball. "If that bit of pressure isn't right, then they are through you and into your backline. That is why we didn't put him in as a 10 the other night. There are games where there isn't that same tactical challenge in midfield. That might be the slot he can go and express himself. But his club don't do that, so there must be a reason for that."

England will be at risk of going out if they lose by four goals to Wales, who are on the brink of elimination. Southgate does not want to rotate too heav-

Continued on page 49

Continued from page 48

ily after naming an unchanged lineup against Iran and the USA. He is set to freshen up his midfield by starting Jordan Henderson instead of Jude Bellingham, and Marcus Rashford hopes to replace Raheem Sterling on the left. But he does not want to omit Kane, even though he said the captain felt some discomfort in his right foot against the USA.

"We haven't qualified yet," Southgate said. "There has to be a balance of freshness – the two games have taken a lot out of the players – but also stability. If you make lots of changes you can lose a bit of rhythm as well."

Southgate must decide whether to give minutes to Kyle Walker and Kalvin Phillips after the City duo's return from injury. He is confident they would not be short of sharpness in any knockout games.

▲ *Gareth Southgate described Phil Foden as 'a great option' for England. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images*

"They are in with the group in training," Southgate said. "They are able to adapt more and more to be ready for a game. Each couple of days that passes is better for them because they're getting more football."

Southgate was asked whether he thought about using Trent Alexander-Arnold as an attacking substitute against the USA. The Liverpool right-back is yet to feature in Qatar, with Kieran Trippier preferred while Walker builds his fitness after groin surgery. An option against Wales would be to rest Luke Shaw, move Trippier to the left and start Walker.

Southgate said of Alexander-Arnold: "He definitely could do it against a team that sits back. But that's not how I saw the game against the States. I don't think they sat back at all. I think they were aggressive and athletic in their pressure. But he has some great quality with the ball and can do that, but Tripps has great quality as well."

▲ *Jordan Henderson could start after coming off the bench against the USA. Photograph: Luca Bruno/AP*

England trained in hot conditions at their base in Al Wakrah. Only Ben White was absent through illness. James Maddison will be in the matchday squad for the first time after a knee injury.

Southgate resolute England can counter Wales' fire with 'ruthless' skill

David Hytner in Doha

Gareth Southgate's words were diplomatic but his eyes and broad smile told the real story. The subject was *that* video, the one of the Wales squad celebrating wildly upon England's Euro 2016 exit against Iceland in the last 16. Would the England manager draw upon it before the World Cup meeting with Wales on Tuesday night?

"I couldn't say," Southgate replied. "We are aware of some of that but I couldn't say if we would use it or not ..."

As Southgate trailed off, all that was missing from him was a nod. The clip had landed, all right. Southgate was an observer for Uefa's technical committee that night rather than a part of the England setup but he felt it – a shovel of salt to an open wound.

The subsequent Wales explanations did not exactly smooth things over – the protestations of having been lost in the romance of Iceland's moment, the kinship with an underdog nation. Perhaps the Wales players were just sorry that the footage had leaked. Then again maybe they were not.

Luke Shaw has already referenced it here in Qatar, the defender saying that England are a "respectful group" who "do things in the right way". In other words, they would not gloat at the demise of a rival. But the dynamics of an England fixture against one of the home nations have long been peculiarly lopsided, the impression being that they do not have as much to gain in victory and so much more to lose in defeat.

▲ *Gareth Southgate says England's 0-0 draw with Scotland at Euro 2020 will be a reference point. Photograph: Martin Divíšek/EPA*

Eddie Jones, the England rugby union head coach and a confidant of Southgate's, has often said the home nations want to beat his team more than anything and it has been possible to argue that Wales would paint their World Cup as a relative success if they were to win "The Battle of Britain" – even if it were not enough to carry them through to the last 16.

Southgate might not have chosen to have a derby like this at a major tournament, loaded with the potential for chaos, when control can be difficult to find. It did not work out too well when it last came up – the second group game at Euro 2020, when his team laboured to a 0-0 draw against Scotland, the manager saying the heat of the occasion had affected his players.

Southgate described the game as a "reference point", one in which Scotland "found a level physically they hadn't found before and couldn't find in the game after". Then again, he continued, was it not ever thus when England play? He noted how the USA had covered more ground against his team in the 0-0 draw last Friday than any other opponent across his six-year tenure. "It will be interesting to see if they can replicate that in their next game," he said.

Southgate will not shy from embracing the emotion of the showpiece at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium. He wants to channel it. "If people want to say that Wales will have more passion, then no problem, but they wouldn't know our dressing room very well. Or any of the England dressing rooms I was in as a player. That's an easy narrative for people to say. It's not my experience of it."

On the other hand, Southgate knows cool heads must accompany the hot hearts. As ever, balance is everything. "You have to match the spirit [of Wales] and display the quality with the ball that allows us to be ruthless. We have to make sure our emotional focus is on what we do well."

It has been easy to see the parallels between England's Euro 2020 campaign and their World Cup so far. An encouraging victory in the opening match (Croatia at the European Championship; Iran here) followed by an underwhelming stalemate after which the team were booed off. And now, as before the Czech Republic fixture at Euro 2020, there is the demand for a cohesive, front-footed win – and featuring a fresh face in the forward line. Against the Czechs, the clamour was for Jack Grealish, who came in and played well. Now it is for Phil Foden.

Southgate, who is into his fourth World Cup, is all too familiar with the drama, including those around team selection. "When I was playing, the players were more narky about it. Every country has got it. We are 32 teams ... 26 are in crisis at the moment.

"Every individual country has their support entirely focused on them. You have to live with that, be strong enough and calm enough to come through that.

▲ *England are crushed after losing against Iceland at Euro 2016. Photograph: JMP/Shutterstock*

You are never sitting comfortably and, if we were, that would be a worry because you don't want that comfort. You need an edge."

The key difference between now and the European Championship or, indeed, the 2018 World Cup, is that Southgate's team have not qualified after two games. England need something against Wales, especially to progress as the group leaders, although they do not need very much to avoid elimination – anything other than a four-goal defeat.

Southgate will make changes against a Wales team he suspects could change their system. "Every team we have played has defended slightly differently against us because they recognise our threat," he said.

England defeated Wales at the Euro 2016 group stage with a last-gasp Daniel Sturridge goal but it was Wales who went further, all the way to the semi-finals, and how they revelled in the achievement. It has not been forgotten.

Infantino is the nowhere man in this bonfire of greed, vanity and despotic power

Barney Ronay in Doha

Today I feel ... largely invisible. Today I feel like a boggle-eyed despot-groupie. Today I feel like essence of human avarice distilled through a series of filters, poured into a dark suit and presented on stage looking like a discredited small-town mayor with a secret.

Today I feel like I really should, for the sake of world football, start to get a grip on this chaotic Fifa World Cup.

It is hard to know whether Gianni Infantino feels any of these things right now. It is nine days since Infantino delivered his opening press conference speech, his Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock moment, his I Have a Really Horrendous And Deluded Dream.

For all its hallucinogenic qualities, that speech suggested Fifa's president intended to run this World Cup under strict standing orders. However, in the days since, the most notable aspect of Fifa's presence at its own super-show is its diffidence.

Infantino has gone into stealth mode. Fifa itself has seemed marginalised. An organisation defined by control-freakery, its tendency to assume quasi-governmental powers while hovering over its host like an alien tripod, has gone quiet.

Even worse, this has happened just as fires have begun to break out across this thing. A cast ranging from an angry Carlos Queiroz, to the massed brain-shouts of social media, to Infantino himself, has continued to debate the rise of the global south and the decadence of Europe, as expressed via World Cup group standings.

Mohammed bin Salman continues to circle the feast. Antony Blinken has used Wales versus the USA as a platform to present to the world Uncle Sam shaking hands with its keenest current

Continued on page 50

Continued *from page 49*

Middle Eastern ally.

And right now Qatar 2022 feels less like the usual soft-power stage, more like a kind of real-time super-Davos, Yalta with a K-pop soundtrack. Is this really the moment for a closed-circle monarchy to start driving the world's greatest sporting spectacle?

There have been no more public Fifa briefings in Doha. This is not unusual as tournaments go. But it is unfortunate given the many issues arising. Reporters and football administrators have spoken of being passed back and forth between host nation and governing body, questions left unanswered. Fifa's handling of the informal/nonexistent semi-ban of rainbow items has involved vague, delayed statements. There is a sense of waiting always for the nod from the Supreme Delivery Committee.

Nobody puts Gianni in the corner. Except, it would seem, Hassan Abdullah al-Thawadi, chief executive of Qatar 2022, who some say is having a significant final pass on key details that affect supporters, federations, world football generally.

The past few days have seen confusion over the right to express even the most broadly sketched political views, most notably the spectacle of stadium guards taking away Iranian protest flags. Fifa's statutes contain a commitment to "respecting all recognized human rights" and "striving to promote the protection of these rights". This is in effect part of Infantino's job description.

▲ *Gianni Infantino at the Japan v Costa Rica game on Sunday. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters*

And yet it seems T-shirts with words as inoffensively universal as "Women" and "Freedom" are now banned in Fifaland. Meanwhile Iran and Qatar share the world's largest gas field. You really think you're in control?

The end result is a dangerous and rancorous mess. Fifa and Qatar always looked the perfect fit, the perfect master and client-state. In the event Qatar appears to have overwhelmed its enablers, seized the starship controls and confined the captain to his quarters. At times one half expects to find Qatari government officials out there sternly pronouncing on refereeing appointments, player of the match gongs and the fact Gareth Southgate MUST now pick Phil Foden or squander a golden legacy.

This matters, because it is getting hot out here. The soundtrack of Qatar 2022 is a glaze of hope, love, We-Are-The-Dreamers stuff, undercut by a babbling undertone of anger and macro-grudges.

This runs right from Queiroz and Jürgen Klinsmann going toe-to-toe over cultural slights, to Serbia's dressing-room flag reclaiming Kosovo, to John Herdman's statement (Why John, why?) that Canada would "fuck" Croatia, to government ministers on all sides wading into the cultural frictions.

Fifa has bowed to Qatar's will on the armband-of-love, even as Qatari officials wear their Palestinian rights symbols in the seats. LGBTQ+ bodies have called on Infantino to speak out, to feel as gay as he did nine days ago when he stood before the world as Football Jesus and promised love, harmony and a level of basic governance.

Instead Fifa's most recent public guidance on all this is to announce that Germany are under investigation for not putting a player up at their press conference; and that the media need to use cabled internet connections as the press box wifi is in crisis. Thanks for that.

Meanwhile Infantino sits on top of this bonfire of greed, vanity and despotic power like a boggle-eyed Guy Fawkes mannequin, occasionally paraded about the place in his wheelbarrow or allowed to stand in the VVIP box and crunch his toffee apple for the cameras.

This leadership vacuum matters beyond simply the chaos on the ground. Fifa's unchallenged primacy, its endless growth, is not a given. There has already been talk of some European nations getting itchy feet. Plans have been mooted now and then for a European and South American breakaway. Money, and the ongoing primacy of money, suggest the World Cup is too valuable to nobble itself in this way. But bridge-building and concessions are part of its success. Nothing lasts forever.

Infantino was supposed to be a technocrat when he took the top job, a safe-ish pair of hands after the debauchery of the Blatter years. He has turned out to be something much harder to gauge. Who is this person anyway? A despot's glove puppet? An oleaginous pinocchio? A highly competent dissembler, smart enough to give a speech the western media see as deluded, but which was also perfectly pitched towards the Fifa members who will keep him in power?

With Blatter there was evidence of simple human vanity, the dreams of a Nobel Peace Prize and so on. The question of what Infantino wants is less

▲ *Gianni Infantino with Yasser Al-Mishal (left), president of the Saudi football federation, and Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki, Saudi Arabia's sport minister. Photograph: Reuters*

clear. One remarkable aspect of Qatar's control of this World Cup is that Infantino has not blinked, has not wavered in his total support. Either he simply loves power, or those powers have a degree of leverage over him that is not immediately clear.

More likely this game is being played at a level beyond such petty concerns as order on the ground. There may be fraught and divisive days in store before the final whistle. But Fifa is still expected to rake in a record $7.5bn (£6.3bn) from this messiest and most divisive of World Cups.

Saudi Arabia 2030 seems to be hardening as a possibility every day. Ignore the white noise. Just keep your eyes on the balance sheet. You get the leaders you deserve, or in football's case the leaders your leader most wants to stand next to. Either way the global game has never looked quite so managed and muzzled and at the same time so out of control.

No reason Wales can't spring World Cup shock against England, says Bale

Ben Fisher in Doha

"The dragon on my shirt; that's all I need," Gareth Bale said, looking down at the Wales crest on his red polo shirt, swaying on a swivel chair in Dinard with a little abandon before their quarter-final victory over Belgium at Euro 2016. That statement feels as though it will soon be put to the test.

As the sun set in Doha on Monday, morphing into the marshmallow skies, Bale was again holding court, repeatedly checking his watch as the questions flowed. He knew it was only a matter of time before he was asked whether Wales's game against England on Tuesday could be his last for his country? "Nope," Bale snapped back, arms folded. Well, that's that – for now at least.

Not all questions were so predictable. Among the others was: how was the rack of Welsh lamb? On Sunday the celebrity chef Bryn Williams brought Welsh cakes and cooked dinner, fit with mint sauce and caper dressing, at the team hotel in West Bay. "Hopefully it gives us a better performance – we would love nothing more," Bale said with a spoonful of perspective.

"We are trying to keep our spirits high. We have to remember we are at a World Cup, for the first time in a long time. We would rather be at a World Cup maybe not doing amazingly well

▲ *Gareth Bale during a Wales training session in Doha. He said spirits were high in the camp as they prepare to face England. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters*

than sat at home on the sofa not doing anything. We are happy to be here and we are going to give everything we can to try to qualify."

Six years ago Bale, whose career is winding down in the US, could do no wrong, a superpower grazing and grinning his way through Wales's extraordinary ride to the semi-finals. He infamously served up a home run for anyone with even a millilitre of Welsh blood, insisting Wales had more passion than England.

"I feel we are the most passionate country in the world and that will never change in my mind," Bale maintained the day before Wales flew to Qatar. But suddenly he – together with Aaron Ramsey – finds himself on the sharp end of the flak thrown Wales's way following a miserable start to their first World Cup in 64 years.

Perhaps the difficulty is that we have come to expect so much more. It has led Bale into a strange and somewhat awkward spot where the player who is probably Wales's finest of all time feels it necessary to justify his workrate amid the clamour, in places, for him to be dropped so he can hand the baton on to a younger model.

"I was flying into tackles in the 95th minute the other day," he said. "Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes I have a good game, sometimes I don't. It's football; it's difficult to always play well. The one thing I always do is give 100%."

Rob Page, the Wales manager, gave credence to the possibility of Bale and Ramsey being among the substitutes at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium. "It's a big ask for anybody in this environment to go four days later from one competitive game to another," Page said.

"They are talented footballers. OK, we're all getting a bit of criticism right now, and rightly so because results ain't going our way and [because of] our performances. That's the industry. We're big enough to take it – it's not a problem. We'll put our big-boy pants on and get on with it. We'll have a team that's ready for England."

Bale knows England are not infallible. "Everyone has weaknesses," the Wales captain said. "We've done our homework. We've had meetings and I'm sure they've done the same with us. England are a very good team. They are one of the favourites to win the tournament. We are under no illusions that it will be hard. There's been a few shocks in the tournament already and there's no reason why we can't do the same."

In the summer Bale insisted there were a few more years left in the legs and that he wants to help Wales reach another European Championship, for which qualifying begins in March. He signed a 12-month contract with Los Angeles FC that runs until June with the scope to extend until 2024. But for a while it has been impossible to escape the sense that Bale is making it up as he goes along, playing minutes and scoring wonder-goals on his terms, orbiting his

▲ *A dejected Neco Williams and Gareth Bale sit on the turf after Wales's dramatic, devastating defeat to Iran. Photograph: Javier García/Shutterstock*

own star.

Since the qualifying for this competition began 18 months ago, Wales have unashamedly been his primary focus. So would exiting the World Cup give Bale a decision to make? "I will play for Wales until the day I stop playing football," the 33-year-old said last year. "I love playing for Wales."

Wales will fly home to Cardiff unless they can beat England for the first time since 1984, and even then that might not be enough. Technically, qualifying for the last 16 is in their own hands but unless they spank England by a four-goal margin, to progress they need a win and Iran and the USA to play out a draw.

"We don't get divided by a bad team performance or result," Bale said, alluding to Wales's Together Stronger slogan that has stuck since Euro 2016. "We stick together because we are stronger as a group." Regardless of how Tuesday unfolds, Bale deserves a dignified exit.